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FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO COOK

**How to Grill
Vegetables
for Salads**

**Sear Tender
Skirt Steak for
Easy Dinners**

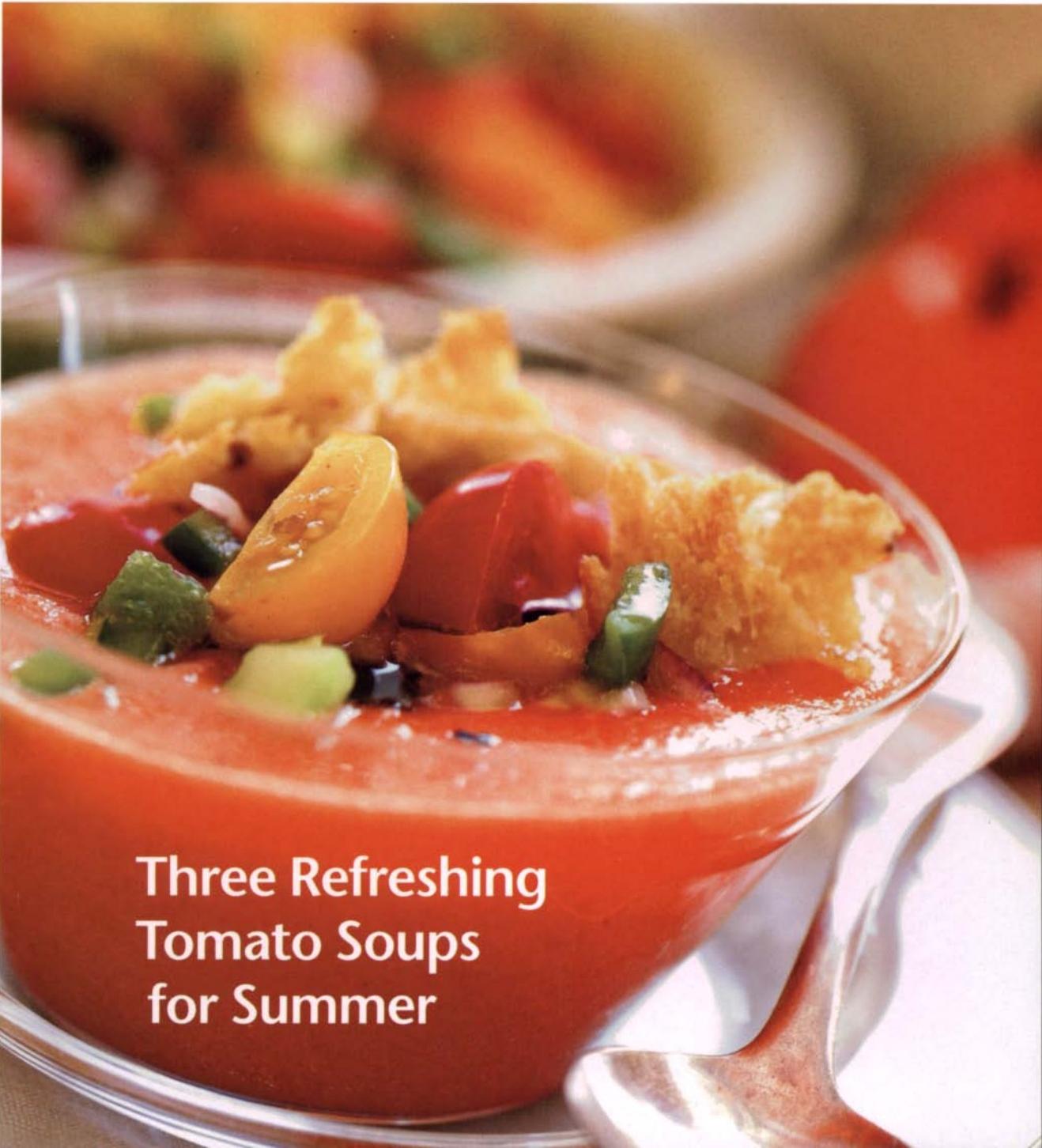
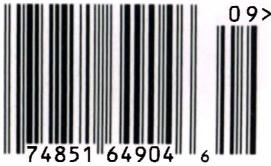
**Perfect Angel
Food Cake**

**Learning to
Cook with
Lemongrass**

Clambake

**An Ice Cream
Sandwich for
Grown-Ups**

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A close-up photograph of a bowl of vibrant red tomato soup. The soup is garnished with several pieces of golden-brown, crouton-like bread. Interspersed among the bread are various colorful vegetables, including orange bell pepper slices, green jalapeño pepper rings, and small red cherry tomatoes. The bowl is set against a blurred background of more food items, creating a sense of depth and focus on the main dish.

**Three Refreshing
Tomato Soups
for Summer**

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50 Celebrate summer with corn, clams, and lobsters, cooked up clambake-style

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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1997 ISSUE 22

DEPARTMENTS



- 6 Letters
- 8 Q&A
- 10 At the Market
How to pick a ripe, juicy plum
- 14 Notes
- 16 Technique Class
Cooking and shelling succulent lobster
- 18 Kitchens for Cooks
Choosing handsome and practical kitchen flooring
- 22 Tips
- 55
Savor the exotic taste of lemongrass on roast chicken, in soups and sauces—in thirst-quenching lemonade, too
- 66 Basics *Shucking shellfish; getting corn off the cob; infusing liquids*
- 70 Food Science
Cooking proteins the right way
- 71 Advertiser Index
- 74 Flavorings *Honey*
- 76 Reviews
Sweet and savory cooking with fruit
- 80 Calendar
- 85 Recipe & Technique Index
- 85 Nutrition Information
- 86 Tidbits
- 88 Artisan Foods
Roasting coffee beans



ARTICLES

26 Smoky-Sweet Salads from the Grill

by Beth Dooley & Lucia Watson

Grilling transforms juicy vegetables and hardy greens into full-flavored, warm-weather salads

32 Easy-Cooking Skirt Steak

Is Full of Flavor

by Richard Chamberlain

Pound it thin, add a marinade or a rub, and use intense heat for quick-cooking, juicy beef

36 The Season Is Ripe for Tomato Soups

by Joanne Weir

An icy gazpacho, a spicy broth with chicken and couscous, and a creamy classic make the best of summer's favorite vegetable

40 Vibrant Salsas Enliven Grilled Foods

by Liz Dobbs

A sharp knife and a little imagination are all you need to make the most delicious salsas of the season

42 When It Comes to Angel Food Cake, God Is in the Details

by Flo Braker

Properly whipped egg whites and two kinds of sugar make a high-rising cake that's tender and light

46 Making Robust, Flavorful Orecchiette Pasta

by Natalie Danford

An easy method for chewy and delicious "little ears" of pasta—try them with three quick sauces

50 A New England Style Clambake Cooked on a Grill

by Sam Hayward

Savor a true taste of summer with shellfish, chicken, sausage, and vegetables, all kissed with smoke

55 Lemongrass Seduces with Citrusy Fragrance

by Mai Pham

Use this fragrant herb to infuse soup, flavor roast chicken, season fish, and make the best lemonade

60 Master Class: Make a Milk Chocolate and Toasted Marshmallow Ice Cream Sandwich

by Stephen Durfee

This scrumptious dessert takes its inspiration from a childhood favorite—campfire s'mores

On the cover: Gazpacho with Sourdough Croutons (article begins on p. 36).

Cover photo, Rita Maas. These pages: top left, Mark Ferri; bottom left, Alan Richardson; above, Brian Hagiwara; below, Karl Petzke.

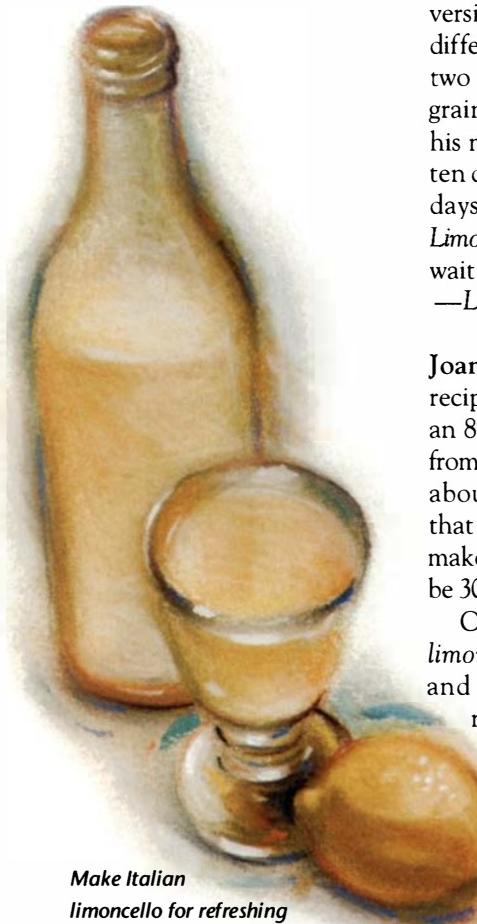
42

Learn the secrets to baking a high-rising angel food cake, perfect with summer berries



LETTERS

If you'd like to share your thoughts on our most recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies, here's the place to do so. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail: fc@taunton.com.



Make Italian limoncello for refreshing summer drinks and desserts.

Fine Cooking is looking for a senior-level editor to join our staff. We need someone with culinary school training or professional cooking experience, as well as five or more years in food journalism. The job requires some travel. Send résumé to Personnel, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

Why wait so long to drink limoncello?

Three years ago, I took a cooking course in Amalfi, and it was obvious that nearly everyone in Amalfi makes *limoncello*. I was therefore very interested in Joanne Weir's article "Italy's Refreshing Lemon Liqueur" (*Fine Cooking* #19, p. 66). My instructor from the Luna Convento Hotel was kind enough to share his recipe with me. His version (which is delicious) is different from Ms. Weir's in two key ways: he uses whole-grain alcohol, not vodka, and his method only takes about ten days instead of the eighty days in Ms. Weir's method. *Limoncello* is so delicious, why wait so long to enjoy it?

—Lou Campoli, Norwalk, CT

Joanne Weir replies: My recipe comes from Concetta, an 80-year-old fabulous cook from Amalfi. In talking to her about her recipe, I realized that if there were 30 *limoncello* makers in a room, there would be 30 different recipes.

Concetta likes to make *limoncello* over eighty days, and she feels the lemon peel really imparts a stronger lemon flavor. Sometimes she leaves the alcohol on the peels for up to a year. As long as the white pith has been scraped off, the results are amazing.

You're right to note that whole-grain spirits are used in Italy, but since this kind of alcohol isn't available in many states, I use the best-quality 100-proof vodka. In fact, vodka was recommended to me by another Amalfi native who now lives in the U.S. He gave a batch to his sister who's still on the Amalfi coast; she

liked it so much that she's now converted to vodka, too.

Cornbread controversy

Shame on *Fine Cooking* and Crescent Dragonwagon for omitting the most important step in making great cornbread (*Fine Cooking* #20, p. 44). If the cornbread isn't turned out of the pan (leaving the crust side up) as soon as it's out the oven, the bread gets soggy.

I may live north of the Mason-Dixon Line now, but I haven't forgotten any of my childhood cooking lessons.

—Mary Hamilton Lesser,
Cincinnati, OH

Crescent Dragonwagon replies: Ms. Lesser is right that cornbread left in the skillet long enough to cool does grow soggy from the trapped steam. It also swiftly loses its warmth as that same steam escapes. To me, perfect cornbread is good and warm (but not hot-hot; it's too crumbly). The skillet keeps the bread hot, which is why I leave the bread there and serve it fairly swiftly, within about 10 minutes. If you plan to use cornbread for dressing, rather than eating it as a hot bread, by all means turn it out--on a rack, not a plate--or it will get soggy.

Searching for the spiral slicer?

Many readers have asked where they can buy the Japanese spiral slicer featured in "Learn to Use the Tools the Pros Love," (*Fine Cooking* #20). Two mail-order sources are Williams-Sonoma (800/541-2233), item #72-811-703, \$45; and Sur La Table (800/243-0852), item #3890, \$46.95.

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1/2 cup diagonally sliced carrot

2 garlic cloves, minced

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8 cups chicken stock, fat skimmed from surface

1/4 tsp. saffron

1 cup diagonally cut French green beans (slender)

1/2 cup baby lima beans, fresh or thawed frozen

3 Tbsp. orzo (rice shaped pasta)

1 cup coarsely chopped hearts of escarole

1 cup zucchini and/or yellow squash, quartered lengthwise and cut diagonally

1/2 cup diagonally sliced asparagus spears

1/2 cup diagonally sliced scallions

1/2 cup tiny peas, fresh or thawed frozen

1/3 cup diced plum tomatoes, peeled and seeded, fresh or canned (optional)

Salt, pepper and Parmesan cheese, to taste

1. Combine potato, celery, carrot, garlic and olive oil in large broad saucepan. Cover; cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are tender, but not browned, about 10 min.

2. Add broth and saffron. Heat to boiling. Stir in green beans, lima beans, orzo. Cook, stirring, until tender, about 8 min. Add escarole; simmer 5 min.

3. Stir in zucchini and/or yellow squash, asparagus, scallions, green peas. Simmer just until tender and heated through, about 5 min. Add tomatoes, if using. Salt and pepper, to taste. Ladle into bowls. Serve sprinkled with slivers of Parmesan cheese. Serves 6-8.

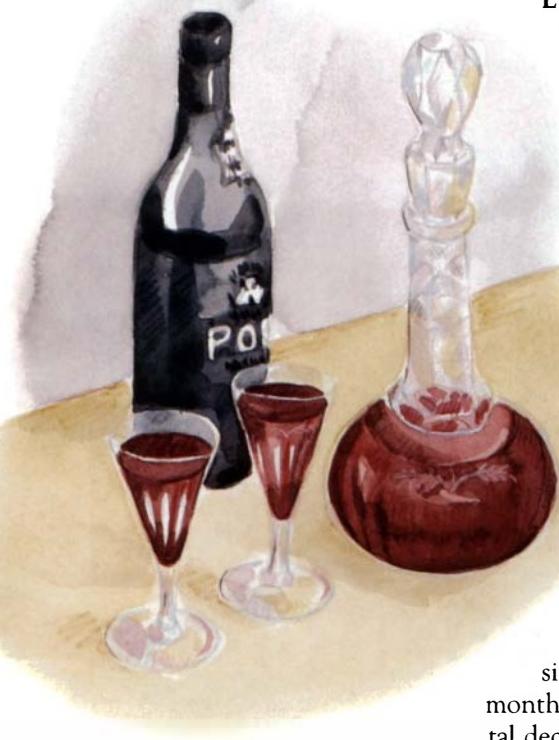
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Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.



Store port and other wines in glass; save that crystal decanter for serving only.

Don't store port in crystal decanters

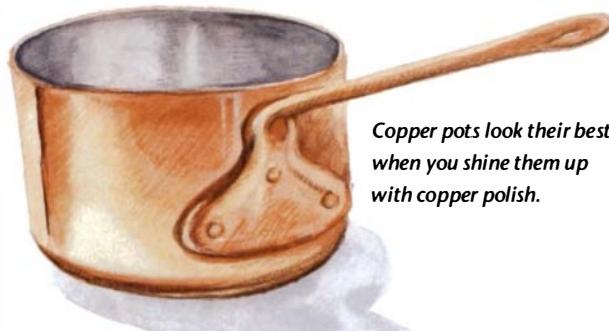
I was recently given two antique crystal decanters and was hoping to use them to store vintage port. Is there a risk of contamination to the wine from being kept in lead crystal containers?

—Sarah Finkelberg,
via e-mail

Elisabeth Holmgren

replies: Current research shows that storage in lead crystal can increase the lead content of wine, or any other food or beverage, especially those with high acidity, such as fruit juices, jellies, and jams.

A recent study at Columbia University published in *The Lancet*—the British medical journal—found that the lead content of port wine increased significantly after four months of storage in lead crystal decanters. Based on that information, I recommend that you store your vintage port in its original glass bottle



Copper pots look their best when you shine them up with copper polish.

or in glass decanters (use a tight-fitting stopper) and save your antique crystal decanters for serving only.

Elisabeth Holmgren is director of research and education for the Wine Institute.

Keep copper pots shiny with a good copper cleaner

I enjoyed your recent article on pots and pans, and I recently bought myself a copper saucepan. What's the best way to polish copper pans and keep them looking good?

—Bob Kinghorn,
Minnetonka, MN

Susanna Linse replies: While some cooks like the aged look of slightly tarnished copper, it takes just a few minutes and a good copper cleaner to restore a lovely warm glow. Red Bear polish is excellent; so is Copperbrill, which isn't quite as oily as other polishes and so it's a bit easier to rinse off.

You don't have to leave copper polish on for long; just apply it in circular motions with a soft cloth or a sponge, and then wash the pan in hot, soapy water and dry it thoroughly. It's a good idea to wear rubber gloves when polishing copper, since you're using a cleaning chemical.

Whenever you use an unlined piece of copper, such as a preserving pan or an egg-white-beating bowl, you must polish the interior before each use because air and traces of food can result in a toxic green deposit called verdigris. You can remove verdigris easily by polishing the copper with a paste of about one part salt to two parts vinegar, or rub it with a piece of lemon sprinkled with salt, and then wash and dry the pan.

Susanna Linse is public relations director for Sur La Table, a cookware store in Seattle.

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Bring marinated meat to room temperature for even cooking

I've seen many recipes for marinated chicken and other meat that call for taking the meat out of the refrigerator an hour or more before cooking time. Is this safe? What does it accomplish?

—Piney Kellerman,
Brooklyn, NY

James Peterson replies: The purpose of pulling meat or chicken out of the fridge before cooking is to bring it close to room temperature, which will help it cook evenly. This is especially true for food that you'll roast or grill—if the meat is too cold, the surface will dry out and may even char before the cold interior finishes cooking. For example,

a steak that you want to cook rare might end up cold inside, even though it may feel as if it's properly cooked.

If you're marinating meat for a slow-cooking stew, there's no reason to bring the meat to room temperature—simmering will heat the meat evenly.

Wine, vinegar, and yogurt inhibit the growth of dangerous bacteria; when I'm using any of these ingredients in a marinade, I'll leave the marinating meat at room temperature for a few hours or even longer. The warmer temperature also speeds up the marinade's flavoring and tenderizing effects. The USDA, however, recommends that you marinate all meat in the refrigerator and that you leave marinating meats at temperatures between 40° and 140°F for no longer than two hours.

James Peterson is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.

Does storage affect flour's nutritional value?

Does flour lose nutritional value if it isn't refrigerated?

—Dorothy Gould,
Chicago, IL

Karen Duester replies: All types of flour are relatively "shelf stable" and lose minimal nutrients, if any, during storage. All-purpose flour has a shelf life of 20 to 22 months after milling. After that time, it may begin to break down and discolor. Whole-grain flours have a shorter shelf life of about six



The best bet for jelly rolls is a light, thin sponge cake.

months. With longer storage, their natural oils may become rancid, resulting in an unpleasant taste and smell.

Store flour in an airtight container in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight. Refrigeration doesn't help flour retain its nutrients, but it can help extend the shelf life of whole-grain flours.

Grain flours are rich in vitamin E, the B vitamins, and several minerals, including iron, copper, magnesium, and zinc. Whole-grain flours also have the added benefit of dietary fiber.

Karen Duester, a registered dietitian, is the owner of the Food Consulting Company in San Diego.

A thin sponge cake is best for roulades

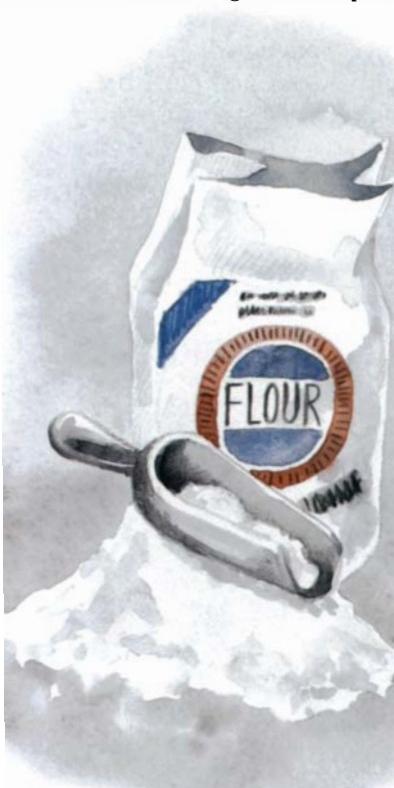
I like making jelly-roll cakes and wonder what makes a good, thin cake suitable for a roulade? Can a butter cake work, or is a sponge cake the only route? Is it better to bake a thick cake and shear it into layers?

—Joanne Bouknight,
Cos Cob, CT

Carole Bloom replies: A thin, light génoise or sponge-type cake, about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, is best for making a roulade. This type of cake is leavened with eggs or egg yolks whipped until they hold their shape. The whipped eggs make the cake moist and flexible, which allows it to be rolled easily and to hold its shape.

It's important to roll the cake in kitchen parchment immediately after it's removed from the oven, while the cake is still hot and pliable. Then leave it to cool completely. This sets the rolled shape and allows the cake to be re-rolled easily after it has been filled.

Don't overbake the cake or it will be too dry, which causes it to crack when you roll it. If you shear a thick cake and roll the layers, you'll have to let it cool first, which will make the layers fragile and at high risk for cracking. Carole Bloom is author of four cookbooks. Her latest is *Sugar & Spice: Sensational Desserts with Vivid Flavors* (HP Books, 1996). ♦



All-purpose flour stays fresh for almost two years after milling.

How to Pick a Ripe, Juicy Plum

The sweetest, the wildest of all summer fruit, plums grow everywhere. Planted by birds and pit-spitting children, plum trees sprout beside fields and beaches and come in colors as varied as rosebuds—pinks and purples, golds and scarlets.

A plum for everyone. Two hundred to three hundred varieties of plums are grown in the United States today. An enormous number of these have appeared, disappeared, then reappeared “improved” or crossbred. One suspects it’s a little like dog breeding. The growers aren’t always looking for qualities that you and I covet. Good pollination and heavy yields, understandably top priorities for growers, might not be what the rest of us like best

about a plum. How about flavor, for instance? But in the mêlée, some delicious varieties have emerged, and more are appearing or reappearing all the time.

My favorite plum is the Santa Rosa. Friends swear by Elephant Heart. The green, teardrop-shaped Wickson has gorgeous golden flesh. But don’t overlook an old backyard plum tree or a farmstand near your home that has delicious plums simply named Burt’s Best or Aunt Mae’s.

Plums ripen from June through August. Most commercially grown plums are from California, but Georgia, Idaho, Michigan, South Carolina, and states in the Northwest also ship plums across the country.



Santa Rosa—My favorite. With its rosy-orange flesh and tart, wine-red skin, Santa Rosa is wonderful in sorbets and ice cream.

from the branch, a chemical reaction is triggered that breaks down the fruit’s acids and changes the acid-sugar balance of the fruit. The plum seems to taste sweeter because of the reduced acid.

Ripe plums will probably cost more than plums picked too green. Pay the price, and then eat your fill before the short season is over. Plum seasons are ephemeral, three to four weeks at most. You find one variety you like, and then all too soon it’s gone and the next variety arrives. (By the way, don’t accept “I don’t know” or “Just plums, lady” as a varietal name. By law, the names of both the variety and the packer must be plainly



Mariposa (left) and *Elephant Heart* (above)—These red-skinned plums have watermelon-red flesh that’s beautiful in tarts and compotes. Their sour skin adds zing.



Italian prune—This small European plum is usually dried or “stewed.” Try it in a soufflé; my sister-in-law is famous for hers.



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AT THE MARKET

printed on the box in which the fruit is shipped.)

I go to our best produce store, buy one of each kind of plum, taste them all, and then buy a few pounds of the ones I like best. Ten days later, there's a new array to try. Farmers' markets sometimes offer a taste. My produce man will often cut a plum for me to try.

COOKING WITH PLUMS

Plum ice cream and sherbets,

whether made from yellow or rosy plums, are among the prettiest of frozen desserts. Plum puddings rarely call for plums at all (they're made from dried fruits, spices, and sometimes suet), but Damson plum preserves and Satsuma plum jam are justly famous. Poached plums look stunning in a compote. And Santa Rosa plums, with their rose-pink flesh and wine-red skins, make the loveliest of all fruit tarts.

If you're using plum slices or halves in a tart or pie, leave the skins on for the color they bring. But if you're going to purée your plums, skin them first, even if they're to be strained (the skins can make a purée unpleasantly acidic). If the plums are ripe, the skins should easily pull away. If they're firm, slice a small X in the skin and pour boiling water over them. Drain them after just a minute or two, and the skins will

be loosened enough to peel right off.

Cooking with plums is a seat-of-the-pants operation. Tart varieties usually need more sugar—often more than the recipe calls for. The sweeter varieties may want a little lemon juice or orange juice to give them some zing.

Sally Small works for her family's orchard in the Sacramento Valley and writes about produce. ♦



Black Amber (top) and Laroda (above)—
These "black" plums have a scarlet cast.
Their flavor is relatively mild, but their dark
skin adds depth of color to a compote.



Frontier—Another "black" plum with sweet pink flesh,
Frontier can be very sweet
when picked ripe and is good
for eating out of hand.



Ebony—A "black" plum with yellow flesh. Slices tossed with sugar are delicious with homemade biscuits and softly whipped cream.



Greengage (above)—An old, flavorful plum, called Reine Claude in France, it's similar to the Wickson (left), a green plum with lovely yellow flesh and an elegant teardrop shape.



Shiro—The skin of this yellow plum is thin, almost translucent, allowing the golden flesh to shine through. Lower in acid, Shiro is delicious in compotes and sorbets.

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New Rubbermaid spatula won't melt or stain

For better or worse, I picked up most of my cooking habits from helping my mother in the kitchen. The one tool she used constantly was her Rubbermaid spatula.

It was too short, and it quickly became dog-eared and discolored, but it made perfectly creamy scrambled eggs, and it could scrape out every last bit of

Rubbermaid's heat-resistant spatula is engineered for the rigors of a commercial kitchen.



chocolate cake batter from a messy bowl. I continued to use a Rubbermaid spatula long after I set up my own kitchen. At times, its shortcomings led me to try other brands, but always fruitlessly.

Recently, I chanced upon Rubbermaid's new line of high-heat scrapers and decided to buy one. After four months of continual use, I'm sold on this new product.

This spatula was engineered for the rigors of a commercial kitchen. Unlike other scrapers, it has a hefty break-resistant handle and blade that are permanently joined, so food and its accompanying bacteria can't accumulate in the joint. The blade is ample, flexible, and heat-resistant up to 500°F, which makes it great for scraping hot pans. And not even highly pigmented foods like tomato sauce can stain it. A notched blade eases

scraping, and a hook on the handle prevents the spatula from accidentally drowning in a big pot of soup.

This high-heat scraper is expensive, but it will surely outlast others. A Cook's Wares catalog (412/846-9490) carries the 9½- and 13½-inch spatulas (\$8.70 and \$11.60). *Maggie Glezer is a baker and writer from Atlanta.*

Editors' note: New heat-resistant spatulas are also available from Le Creuset (call 800/827-1798 for dealers) and from the King Arthur Flour Catalogue (800/827-6836).

Asian hot sauce gives the right zing

When I first opened my restaurant, Elizabeth on 37th, many of my recipes, such as Savannah Red Rice with Shrimp & Peppers and a delicate Cream of Leek & Asparagus Soup, called for a dash of hot sauce. I quickly discovered

that my cooks—some burly, some petite—each considered a "dash" to be something different. In coastal Georgia cooking, the zip from a hot sauce should be felt at the end of a



Sriracha hot sauce is a smooth, seedless sauce made from serrano chiles.

dish, not up front, where it can overwhelm the taste buds.

I realized I needed a hot sauce that was mild and smooth and could be measured in teaspoons. I finally found Tu o'ng O't Sriracha—a smooth, seedless, bright-red sauce that's made from serrano chiles. It's milder, thicker, and offers a little more depth of flavor than other hot sauces. You can find it, with its recognizable easy-pour green top, in most Asian food stores for about \$3.29 a quart. At the restaurant, we use 60 quarts of Sriracha a year for just the right zing in recipes such as Lime-Mustard Glazed Fish and Blackeyed Pea Salad.

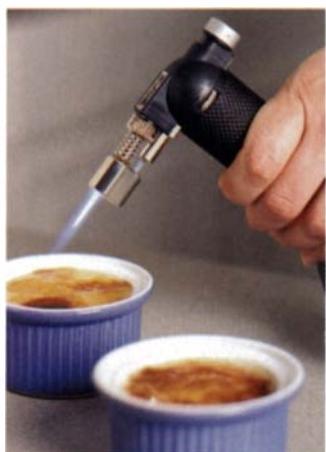
Elizabeth Terry is the chef/owner of Elizabeth on 37th in Savannah, Georgia.

Online Zagat restaurant reviews

Peripatetic diners will be happy to know that Zagat Surveys, the little red guidebooks treasured for their honest restaurant evaluations, have gone online with reviews of restaurants in 30 American cities. The new Web site (www.pathfinder.com/travel/zagat/dine) features the same information (ratings of food, service, decor, and cost, plus quotes from diners) as the guides, which are compiled from questionnaires filled out by frequent restaurant diners. Visitors to the site can check restaurants by name or ask the site for dining suggestions according to type of cuisine. *Susie Middleton is an associate editor for Fine Cooking.*

Miniature blowtorch is a blast for home cooks

Restaurant pastry chefs like me rely on propane blowtorches for a variety of kitchen tasks—browning meringues, smoothing glazes, cleaning marble tops, and finishing crèmes brûlées. For the home cook who wants professional results but is less inclined towards welding, the Microtorch by Roburn is a good alternative. It's small (5½ inches tall), lightweight,



The Microtorch, fueled by butane, is just the thing for caramelizing crème brûlée.

and easy to use, operating off a refillable butane canister. It's long-lasting, too; I caramelized 75 crèmes brûlées in one evening without running out of fuel.

Williams-Sonoma (800/541-2233) sells the Microtorch for \$32; butane cartridges are available at hardware stores.

Stephen Durfee is the pastry chef at The French Laundry in Yountville, California. ♦

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Cooking and Shelling Succulent Lobster

Cracking open and eating lobsters at a clambake is sloppy good fun, but when you want lobster meat for a salad, soup, or pasta—or if you just want to eat it without needing a bib—you need to take the meat out of the shell before serving it.

BUY SMALL, FEISTY LOBSTERS

Be sure the lobsters you buy are lively. When you pick them up, they should flap their tails indignantly—a sign that they're alive and well, if a little annoyed.

I buy the smallest lobsters I can find. Some people say they're more tender than larger ones, but

I buy them because they usually cost less per pound. I also find the smaller ones easier to handle. A 1 1/4- to 1 1/2-pound lobster should give you about 5 ounces of meat, enough for about one serving.

Male vs. female. I don't think it makes much difference to the quality of the meat whether your lobster is male or female, though some people vociferously claim that females are tastier. But if you plan to use the lobster's coral or roe (the unripened eggs found in the tail meat) to give a fish stew, soup, or sauce a deliciously intense lobster flavor, you'll obviously want a female.

The sex of a lobster isn't immediately apparent, except perhaps to another lobster. To find out what you're holding, turn the lobster over so you're looking at the underside of the tail. At the base of the head section, all lobsters have two

small pointed legs. On a male, they're hard and bony; on a female, they're soft and flexible.

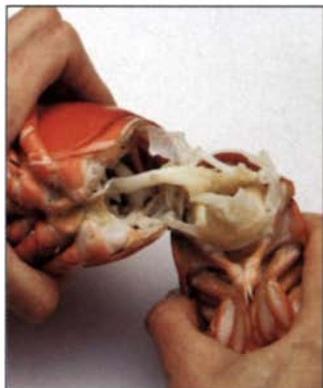
Refrigerate your lobsters until you're ready to cook them, preferably within a few hours of buying them.

BOIL, STEAM, OR GRILL, BUT DON'T OVERCOOK

How you cook a lobster has no bearing on how you remove its meat. But if you overcook it, the meat will be tough and tasteless instead of sweet and tender.

Though you can steam, broil, or grill lobster, boiling is the most popular method. But to avoid overcooking a boiled lobster, don't actually boil it. The water should be at a rolling boil before you put the lobsters in the pot. Once you add them, the water will stop boiling. Leave the pot on high heat, covered, until the water just returns to a boil. Then

You'll find most of the meat in the tail



Twist off the tail. Grab the head section (the thorax) with one hand, the tail with the other, and twist. The parts should separate easily.



Use the heel of your hand to press down on one side of the lobster tail. Press until you feel a gentle crunch.



Pull the sides of the lobster away from each other with both hands. The back of the tail shell should crack, and the tail meat should pop out.



Slice the lobster tail or leave it whole. Use a knife to slice the meat into medallions as shown here or cut it in half lengthwise.

Crack into the claws to free more meat



Snap the claws off where they join the body. You'll have better leverage if you do this before you twist off the tail.



Begin to pull the pincer off each claw by bending the pincer gently from side to side. Then pull the pincer straight out. Most times, the cartilage-like "butterfly" will pull out of the claw along with the pincer.



Crack into the underside of the claw with an old chef's knife. The knife should go in about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Rotate the knife in both directions to split the claw open so you can pull out the meat.



Cut the small claw section with scissors. Use your fingers to coax out the meat from there.

reduce the heat so that the liquid simmers and the lobsters actually poach.

Because I like my lobster cooked just until the meat is still slightly translucent, I poach my lobster for about 5 minutes per $1\frac{1}{4}$ pounds, and then about 2 minutes more for every additional pound. The more traditional cooking time is 8 minutes for the initial $1\frac{1}{4}$ pounds, then 2 minutes for every additional pound.

Keep the tails straight for a pretty presentation. A lobster's tail will curl when exposed to heat. One way to prevent this is to tie a long, flat, dull knife or a wooden spoon along the lobster's underside with string before cooking. Or you can tie lobsters together in pairs so that the tails remain straight, but this may be difficult if they're moving around a lot; it also means that the tails will take longer to cook.

THE MAIN TOOL YOU NEED IS YOUR HANDS

Before shelling lobsters, get a few tools ready: an old chef's

knife (it will take a beating), kitchen scissors, and a bowl to collect the shells and juices that flow from the lobster. Use these tasty juices to flavor a broth, bisque, chowder, or sauce, or to make lobster butter. Though you don't need a bib, you'll probably want to wear an apron to protect your clothes from any stray juices.

To take the meat out of the shell, follow the photos and directions beginning on the opposite page.

Most of the meat is in the tail. Be firm but gentle as you extract the meat from the shell so that it stays in one good-looking piece to be served whole or sliced.

You'll find succulent meat in the claws, too. If you're lucky, the inedible cartilage-like "butterfly" will pull out of the claw along with the pincer, meaning you won't have to look for it when you remove the meat from the claw.

On a larger lobster, the eight smaller legs can yield some tasty bits of meat, which you can push out with a skewer. But if the lobster is small, the amount of meat may not be worth the trouble of excavating it. In such cases, I'll enjoy a couple as a treat for the chef, since sucking the meat out of the legs is usually the easiest way to go.

There isn't much meat in the head, but if you're thrifty, you might want to harvest the meat that lies within the small cartilage chambers along the inside of each half. You'll also find the tomalley here (the lobster's green-colored liver), which I think is the tastiest part of the lobster. I like to force the tomalley through a strainer and then whisk it into a sauce to give the sauce an intense lobster flavor.

The head holds tasty tomalley



Forage for more meat and the tomalley in the head section. Split it open with a knife.



Throw away the head sac, shown here. Spoon out the green tomalley and use a cocktail fork or a toothpick to harvest any meat.

James Peterson, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, teaches cooking across the country. His latest book is *Fish & Shellfish* (William Morrow, 1996.) ♦

Choosing Handsome and Practical Kitchen Flooring

One of the best things about designing kitchens for avid cooks is all the sturdy, good-looking materials available for me to work with. Industrial-grade options tailored for home kitchens, as well as improvements in traditional choices, have made it so that beauty and practicality go hand in hand.

You'll need a kitchen floor that's pleasing to look at as well as durable (after all, the kitchen is the center of activity in most homes). Other factors to consider when you shop for kitchen flooring include care and maintenance, acoustics, wear on your legs and back, and the condition of your existing floor.



Wood offers a classic, warm look but needs care.

Manufacturers split flooring into two categories: resilient and hard surface.

RESILIENT FLOORING IS MORE FORGIVING

Resilient flooring includes wood, cork, vinyl, and high-pressure laminates. All these are quieter, gentler on falling objects, and easier on your legs and back than hard-surface flooring.

Hardwood flooring gives a warm look. It's available unfinished, in finished strips, or in veneered tiles and planks. Though wood finishes are better than ever, wood's properties remain the same: standing water dulls it, furniture and heavy traffic scratch it. Wood needs care. To protect a wood

floor and keep it looking great, do the first two coats of finish in gloss, and the top coat in satin or matte, which is better at hiding scratches.

With prefinished strips or planks, you'll avoid the dust and odor of finishing once you've laid the floor. You won't be able to sand away uneven edges and blips when the planks are down, so strips must be exactly level and the subfloor smooth and flat before the strips are installed. You can also buy finished flooring that's "acrylic impregnated." This industrial-strength flooring is treated with finish that's forced all through the wood, creating an extremely hard surface. On the down side, you'll lose the wood grain depth and detail, but the look will be subtler and won't compete with wooden cabinets. Veneer is lower maintenance, but it can chip, and some finishes can look artificial.

Vinyl has been a long-standing, hassle-free option. Vinyl comes in tiles (also called solid vinyl because the color runs through) and in sheets. Tiles are thicker, more



Cork is attractive, easy to care for, and easy on your feet.



Vinyl tile is durable and comes in many colors.



Sheet vinyl is economical and resilient but shows bumps and scratches.



Laminate needs little maintenance and stands up to wear and tear.



Stone gives a natural but dramatic look.



Ceramic and glass tiles wear well and come in many styles and colors.



Glass composite tiles are colorful and easy to clean.

durable, and there's less waste than with rolled goods. There's also the option of laying patterns using different colored tiles. Sheet vinyl has a cushioned layer that makes it more comfortable underfoot, but it's also more susceptible to indentation and tearing (though manufacturers claim a 95% bounce-back recovery, it isn't that complete). The floor underneath must be very smooth because vinyl reveals all bumps and indentations.

Sheet vinyl needs only a damp mop with mild soap;

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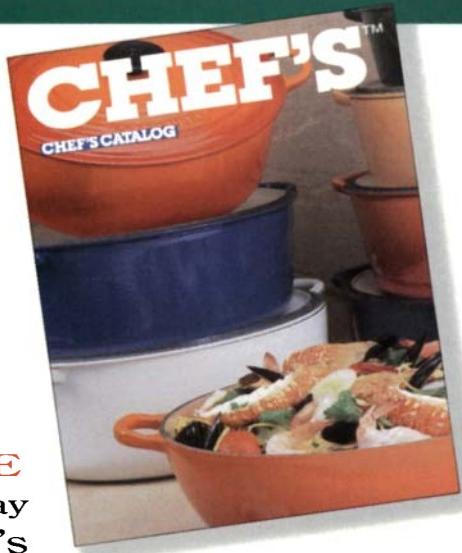
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KITCHENS FOR COOKS

solid vinyl needs periodic cleaning and buffing with an oil-based cleanser for a stronger shine. If the vinyl is textured, it will catch grime more easily and will require scrub-brushing.

Cork is naturally resilient, which makes it both comfortable to stand on and good at deadening sound. It comes in finished squares or in a natural veneer bonded between a vinyl backing and a vinyl surface. I think it's a great choice. Cork offers the warm look of wood, but it's easier to take care of than wood, especially if you buy prefinished cork.

It comes in dark, medium, and light tones, so all kinds of patterns are possible. Cork doesn't have the indentation problems that cushioned sheet vinyls do, but because it's resilient, you'll need to make sure that all the tiles are exactly the same thickness.

High-pressure laminate is similar to the laminates used on countertops, but it's more durable. Designs that look like wood, ceramic, and even stone are available. Laminate is hardy, low-maintenance, and your existing floor need not be removed. A layer of padding underneath muffles

sound and provides resilience and heat insulation, too. But laminate doesn't offer the visual interest that other types of kitchen flooring do.

Solid surfacing, another countertop material, shows wear and tear too easily to be a good choice for flooring.

STONE, CERAMIC, AND GLASS ARE HARD SURFACE

Before you consider laying this type of floor, you'll need to find out from an installer or a builder if your existing kitchen floor can handle the weight of the tiles. If there's too much flex in the floor,

grout joints will pop and tiles will crack.

Hard-surface flooring won't absorb noise. It's tough on falling objects—and on your body. If you stand in the kitchen for long periods and have leg or back problems, this may not be the best choice. Rugs or mats, positioned where you stand while working, will provide cushioning.

Stone is handsome and dramatic; each piece is naturally unique. All types of natural stone need a sealer, one coat of which will last indefinitely, depending on traffic. Granite is your best bet in the

Compare the features of each type of flooring to make the best choice

Material	Cost per square foot*	Leading brands and fabricators	Pros	Cons
Solid wood	\$7 to \$12	Bruce Flooring; Hartco; Permagrain	warm-looking	scratches easily; needs refinishing; expands and compresses; prefinished strips must be absolutely even
Wood veneer	\$10 to \$20	Allied	durable; warmth of wood but lower maintenance	veneer can chip; some finishes have an artificial look
Vinyl tile	\$7 to \$12	Armico; Armstrong; Congoleum; Mannington	wide variety of colors, styles; durable; easy to clean; no upkeep	seams and joints catch dirt; tiles can separate
Sheet vinyl	\$2 to \$5	Armstrong; Congoleum; Mannington	wide variety of colors, styles; no joints; easy to clean; no upkeep	discolors with heavy use; shows bumps in subfloor
Cork	\$8 to \$10	Ipcork Ltd.; Dodge-Regupol	warm-looking; resilient; absorbs noise; looks good with other natural materials	limited patterns; color inconsistencies possible; unfinished tiles need waxing and buffing
Laminate	\$4 to \$6	Pergo; Wilsonart	durable; tight seams; no fading	lacks visual interest
Ceramic tile	\$3 to \$10	Ann Sacks Tile & Stone	stain- and water-resistant; infinite choice; cool in summer; wipes clean	hard on feet, legs, back; grout traps dirt; not a ruler-flat surface; very slippery when wet; noisy; hard on falling objects
Stone	\$8 to \$35	Ann Sacks Tile & Stone	stain- and water-resistant; infinite choice; cool in summer; wipes clean; handsome, dramatic	hard on feet, legs, back; grout traps dirt; not a ruler-flat surface; very slippery when wet; noisy; hard on falling objects
Glass mosaic	\$8 to \$23	Bisazza	infinite design possibilities; looks great; easily personalized; cleans with water and glass cleaner	cost; light colors and grout show dirt and wear; hard on falling objects
Glass composite	\$26 to \$42	Bisazza	infinite design possibilities; looks great; easy to clean; close-set tiles minimize seams	cost; limited colors; hard on falling objects
Terrazzo	\$8 to \$35	Pompei Tile	easy to clean; nonporous; no grout joints; durable	limited availability; hard on falling objects; wear patterns can show
Colored concrete	\$65	Concretemarks Studio	lots of colors and design possibilities; durable	needs sealing and maintenance; hard on falling objects

*Installation not included

kitchen; it's less porous than marble, limestone, or slate, and so it's less apt to stain and scratch. Some companies even specialize in floors made of "reclaimed" or antique stone.

Ceramic tile comes in all kinds of options—stone look-alikes, colors, and antique-looking tiles are just a few. Glazed tile is more resistant to stains and scratches than natural stone, and it doesn't need a sealer. Again, make sure the floor that's already there can bear the weight.

Setting ceramic or stone tiles closer together minimizes grout lines, making a smoother floor that's easier to clean and to slide equipment across. Mixing anti-stain additives into the grout will help keep the floor looking cleaner, too.

Glass tile comes in all sorts of colors and varying degrees

of opacity between 1/2 and 2 inches square. It wears well, especially because of its satiny sheen. It looks great, and the mosaic design possibilities are endless. Another option is



Concrete is durable but may develop a "worn-in" patina.

glass composite: larger tiles made of a mixture of glass bits and resins.

INDUSTRIAL MATERIALS CAN WORK IN THE HOME

Good looking, industrial-type

flooring is becoming an increasingly popular home kitchen choice.

Colored concrete is popular in restaurants for countertops and flooring, and now you



Terrazzo is indestructible and stylish.

can get it for home kitchens, in all kinds of colors and textures and in lighter-weight material that's more appropriate for homes. A concrete floor is quite durable, but only after thorough sealing, which

you'll need to do about once a year. Stains often persist; for some, that worn-in look takes on an appealing patina.

Terrazzo is a mixture of quartz, marble, and epoxy. A terrazzo floor is installed by pouring and troweling. Think of the speckled flooring you've seen in schools, office buildings, and other public spaces.

Now a terrazzo look-alike is available for home kitchens in all kinds of colors and textures. The stuff is indestructible (the Navy has used it on ship floors and walls). Strips of steel can be inlaid in cloisonné-like designs. It offers a seamless, water-resistant floor that's attractive, durable, and easy to clean.

Susan Fixary is a kitchen designer. Her firm, Scott Designs, is in Darien, Connecticut. ♦

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Salmon "chops" hold together well on the grill.

Remove citrus zest from a grater with a pastry brush

To remove orange or lemon zest from your hand grater, simply tap a pastry brush against the outside of your grater, pushing in and out to free the grated zest from the holes. This will clean your grater quickly and efficiently.

—Margaret O'Halloran,
Glen Allen, VA

Bring eggs to room temperature over warm water

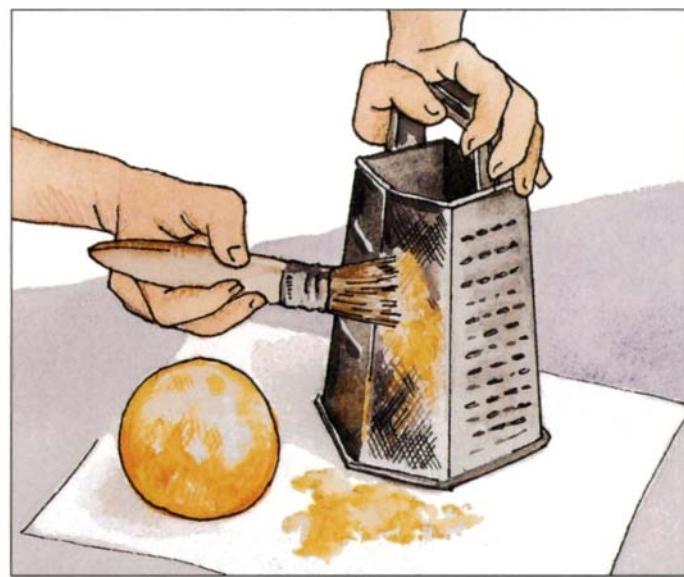
If you need egg whites for a recipe like meringue, you'll find it easier to separate the whites from the yolks when the eggs are cold. Then you'll want to bring your egg whites to room temperature because they'll whip up better. To do this, put them in a bowl and set the bowl over (but not touching) very warm water. When the bottom of the bowl is no longer cool, the whites are warm enough to use.

—Margery K. Friedman,
Rockville, MD

An easier way to grill salmon

My husband and I have tried grilling salmon fillets, starting skin side up and skin side down, and we've had problems with both methods.

Now we've come up with a technique that really works well. We cut our salmon fillet into individual slices (we call them "chops"), each about 1 1/4 inches wide, leaving the skin on. Then we put the "chops" on the grill on their side, with the skin facing out. (We like to use a grill screen). We cook these pieces



A gentle push from a pastry brush will release orange or lemon zest from your grater.

about five minutes on each side over a medium-hot fire. The skin helps hold the salmon together, and we always have delicious, moist salmon, already cut into perfect portions.

—Judy Megan,
Woodbury, CT

Improvise a jar lifter for pickles

While sterilizing pickle jars, I realized I didn't have a good jar lifter to get the jars out of the boiling water. I took thick rubber bands (the kind used for lobster claws and produce) and wrapped them around the tips of the tongs. The wrapped tongs gripped the jars securely so I could pull the pickles out of the boiling water safely and easily.

—Jeanne Schimmel,
Hobe Sound, FL

Pierce whole veggies with corn-cob holders

When microwaving whole potatoes or winter squash, it's usually a good idea to pierce

the vegetable several times so that it cooks more evenly. But trying to pierce tough skin with a fork can be difficult. I've found that corn-cob holders are the perfect piercing instrument—much more effective than a fork. I also use corn-cob holders to prick the skin of duck or geese before roasting them so the excess fat can run out.

—Diana M. Tarasiewicz,
Grand Junction, CO

Soften honey by microwaving it

When trying to get thick honey or syrup out of a jar or plastic squeeze bottle with a narrow neck, microwave the container for about a minute. The liquid will pour out easily.

—Lisa Jung,
San Rafael, CA

Make polenta in a rice cooker

I love polenta, but I'm not always up to the vigil required when cooking it. Now I've found a great way to cook it without much attention—I

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TIPS

use my rice cooker. I whisk together one part polenta with three parts cold water in the rice cooker. I add a little salt, stir lightly, and turn the cooker on. Once the mixture starts to bubble and boil, I stir it carefully every 10 minutes or so, using a long-handled wooden spoon. Once the rice cooker goes from cooking to warming mode, I stir in butter and grated cheese, let it rest for a few minutes, and it's ready to enjoy.

—Jim Shiraishi,
Miranda, CA

Use an inverted cake pan for easier frosting

Instead of frosting a cake on a cake plate, which gets messy, turn a clean cake pan upside down and put a layer of your cake on top of it, frost that layer, then put the next layer



In a pinch, a rubber jar opener will help stabilize a small bowl while you're whisking.

on top and frost it. Put one hand inside the cake pan, and holding it at a comfortable level, frost the sides, which are, of course, flush with the sides of the pan. Using a wide spatula or two, transfer the

frosted cake to a serving plate. The removable bottom of a tart pan also works well for transferring the cake to the serving plate.

—Phyllis Kirigin,
Croton-on-Hudson, NY

Rubber jar openers steady bowls

If you're whisking ingredients in a small bowl (to make a vinaigrette, for example), and the bowl keeps spinning around, try setting a round rubber jar opener under the bowl. The rubber disk will steady the bowl and keep it from moving around as you whisk.

—Maureen Gamble,
Overland Park, KS

Drain deep-fried food on paper bags

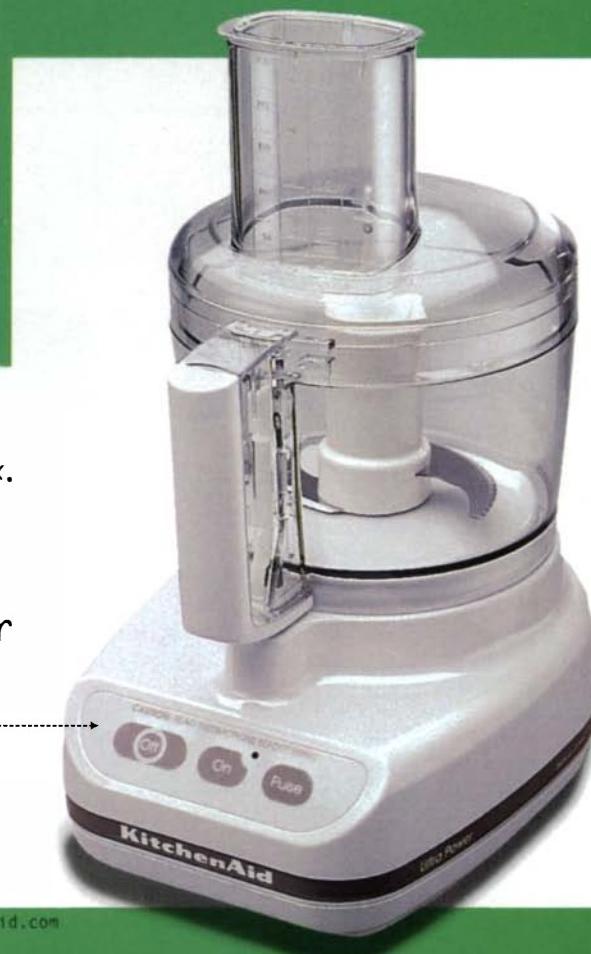
Use a brown paper bag, folded flat, to drain fried or boiled foods. The bag absorbs excess liquid, but it doesn't stick to the food as paper towels sometimes do.

—Mary Sullivan,
Coronado, CA

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Peel garlic with wet fingers

I use a lot of garlic, and I find peeling the cloves to be a chore. The garlic juice makes the peel stick to my fingers like glue. But now I've discovered a trick that really helps. I smash the cloves first to loosen the skin, and then I wet my fingers before peeling. This way, the peel doesn't stick to my fingers.

—Lance Kimdi, Bethel, CT

Pit olives with a cherry pitter

Many recipes I use call for chopped, pitted Greek (kalamata) olives. I used to find it difficult to scrape the olive away from the pit. Now I use a cherry pitter, and it works wonderfully. Just position the olive as you would the cherry and squeeze. Out pops the

pit, leaving the olive ready to be chopped.

—Joan McRae,
Chesapeake, VA

Draining pasta

After boiling pasta, I don't like carrying a heavy pot of hot water to the sink for draining. Instead, I set a colander in a large bowl on an adjacent burner and ladle the cooked pasta into it with a Chinese wire skimmer or tongs. I pour out the pasta water after it has cooled.

—Meri Green,
Wilmington, DE

Vitamin C keeps raw potatoes white

Every cook knows how fast shredded potatoes can turn brown. A tablet of vitamin C (ascorbic acid) cures this problem nicely. Put a vita-



To avoid carrying a big pot of hot water, transfer cooked pasta to a colander set in a large pan, and carry the pasta water to the sink when it's cool.

min C tablet in a bowl with two tablespoons water; let it soften and dissolve. Shred four large potatoes and add them to the dissolved vitamin C, tossing to coat the

potatoes, and then add the other ingredients. The last pancake that you fry will be as white as the first one.

—Lilia Dvarionas,
Kanata, Ontario ♦

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Salade Niçoise is a warm-weather favorite that gets even more summery—and savory—when you grill the main ingredients.

Smoky-Sweet Salads from the Grill

Grilling transforms juicy vegetables and hardy greens into full-flavored, warm-weather salads

BY BETH DOOLEY & LUCIA WATSON

It might sound strange, but you can toss a great salad right from the grill. We got the idea from a friend who spends a lot of time in Italy. During a balmy evening spent in her backyard (yes, it can get balmy in Minnesota), she recreated a simple salad she often ate in Tuscany. She lavished some fruity olive oil on split heads of Belgian endive, sprinkled them with coarse salt, and grilled them on one side until slightly charred. Though our friend served the grilled vegetables with just a squeeze of lemon and a few shavings of Parmesan cheese, the salad was more deliciously complex and flavorful than any salad of raw vegetables—bittersweet and slightly smoky, with a pleasing contrast between the caramelized edges of the charred side and the crisp raw leaves of the other.

We decided to try this simple, rustic technique on some of our favorite salad combinations. We loved the results we got from grilling asparagus and portabella mushrooms, and a grilled version of *salade niçoise* came out great.

SALAD FIXINGS SHOULD BE CHARRED OUTSIDE, TENDER INSIDE

The goal when making a grilled salad is salad fixings that are lightly charred outside and thoroughly cooked inside. You won't need to grill every ingredient, of course; certain vegetables respond well to the grill, and others are disasters. Delicate greens and herbs wilt and get slimy when you grill them, so save



"As soon as the weather will let us, we start tossing salads right from the grill," say Beth Dooley (left) and Lucia Watson.

them to use as a crunchy bed for your grilled ingredients. Hardy greens such as bok choy and cabbage grill up well over medium-high heat. Grilled radicchio is delicious, too, but heat will dull its purplish-red color. Sweet, delicate tomatoes will blacken quickly as they become soft. Green beans, asparagus, and sugar snaps char unevenly (but that's what you're after) and are delicious crisp-tender. Endive and radicchio char and turn tender in spots, staying crunchy in others.

Root vegetables (potatoes, carrots, parsnips, sweet potatoes, and beets) all need quartering, as well as much more time and lower heat to get crusty on the outside and thoroughly cooked and tender within.



See the sidebar at right for our recommendations for grilling ingredients.

A LIGHT COATING OF OLIVE OIL AND A SPRINKLE OF SALT BRING OUT FLAVOR

All grilled salad ingredients need basic preparation, and you should prep the grill, too, by brushing it with a little oil to prevent sticking.

Toss vegetables with olive oil and sprinkle them with coarse salt. The oil coats the vegetables, adding flavor and protection from drying out. Salt adds flavor by itself and helps intensify flavors by pulling moisture out of the vegetables and bringing it to the surface. We like to use coarse salt. Finer



salt is harder to control, so you risk oversalting the vegetables.

SHIFT, ROLL, AND KEEP A CLOSE WATCH

Because vegetables and grill heat both vary, no two vegetables will cook alike. You'll have to dance them around the grill, keeping a close watch, rolling and turning them to keep them from burning. Pour a glass of wine and start a conversation, but don't get too distracted—the "doneness" of each vegetable is key to the success of the salad. As you'll see from the recipes, cooking times will vary depending on the heat of the grill and the size of the vegetables. When you can easily insert a fork into them, they're done.

Grilled Salade Niçoise

Drizzling the vegetables with dressing as they come off the grill makes for a more flavorful salad because the dressing gets absorbed. *Serves four.*

FOR THE DRESSING:

1 Tbs. minced anchovies (about 4)
1 clove garlic, minced
2 Tbs. Dijon mustard
4 tsp. fresh lemon juice
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE SALAD:

8 to 10 small red potatoes, halved or quartered, depending on size
1 large red onion, peeled and sliced ½ inch thick

Tips for grilling successful salads

A lot depends on how hot your grill is and the size of the vegetables, but here's a short primer on time windows for grilling salad fixings.

Short-grilling salad ingredients include asparagus, beans, bell pepper slices, bok choy, leeks, sugar snap peas, summer squash, tomatoes, and zucchini.

Time window: 5 to 8 minutes over medium-hot coals.

Medium-grilling salad ingredients include cabbage wedges, eggplant slices, endive, large mushrooms, and onion slices.

Time window: 13 to 20 minutes over medium-hot coals.

Long-grilling salad ingredients include beets, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, rutabagas, sweet potatoes, and turnips.

Time window: 25 to 35 minutes over medium-low coals.

Tender asparagus turns crunchy and nutty when grilled, as in this Grilled Asparagus & Portabella Mushroom Salad.

Grill endive until it's crunchy-tender and just charred



Dip halved heads of Belgian endive in cold water and gently shake them. Don't dry them—the moisture helps keep the outer leaves from drying out.

2 plum tomatoes, halved
½ lb. green beans, trimmed
Extra-virgin olive oil
Coarse salt
1 to 1½ lb. fresh tuna
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
6 oz. Boston or Bibb lettuce
4 anchovy fillets
2 Tbs. drained capers
4 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and halved
¼ cup niçoise or other good-quality black olives
½ cup fresh basil leaves, cut in thin strips

Make the dressing—In a food processor, whir the anchovies, garlic, mustard, and lemon juice until combined. With the machine running, slowly add the olive oil, a few drops at first, and then in a slow, steady stream. Season with salt and pepper.

Grill the salad—Heat the grill. Lightly coat the potatoes, onion, tomatoes, and beans with oil and sprinkle with salt. Lightly brush the tuna with oil and sprinkle with salt and a little freshly ground pepper. Put the potatoes over medium-low heat and cook until they're fork-tender and roasty looking, turning occasionally to keep them from sticking, 30 to 35 min. total. Put the onion, tomatoes, and green beans on a medium-high part of the grill. Grill the vegetables until they're lightly charred and tender, moving the ingredients around so they don't overcook. The onions will cook in 10 to 15 min., the tomatoes in 5 to 8 min., and the beans in 4 to 6 min. As the vegetables come off the grill, transfer them to a tray or a jelly roll pan, drizzle with dressing, toss lightly, and cover with foil to keep warm.

Meanwhile, grill the tuna over medium-high heat until it's slightly pink in the center, about 6 min. per side. Let it cool for a few minutes and slice. Line four salad plates with the lettuce and arrange the grilled vegetables and tuna on top. Garnish with the anchovies, capers, eggs, and olives. Drizzle with a little more dressing, sprinkle with the basil, and serve.



Toss the endive halves with oil and sprinkle them with coarse salt.

Grilled Asparagus & Portabella Mushroom Salad

Choose asparagus that's on the thicker side; it will grill better than slender stalks. Serves four.

FOR THE DRESSING:
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. grated lemon zest
2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme
1 clove garlic, minced
1 tsp. sugar
⅔ cup vegetable oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE SALAD:
2 lb. thick asparagus, woody ends trimmed
1½ lb. (about 5 giant caps) portabella mushrooms, stems removed and discarded
Extra-virgin olive oil
Coarse salt
4 oz. (about 6 cups loosely packed) mixed greens (a mesclun mix is good), washed and dried

Make the dressing—Combine the lemon juice, zest, thyme, garlic, and sugar in a blender or food processor; blend until smooth. With the machine running, add the oil in a slow, steady stream. Season with salt and pepper.

Prepare the salad—Heat the grill. Toss the asparagus and mushrooms with the oil and sprinkle with salt. Put the mushrooms on a medium-high part of the grill; turn them occasionally to prevent sticking. After about 10 min., add the asparagus and grill it, rolling frequently to avoid burning. Grill the mushrooms until dark and meaty-looking, about 15 min. total; they should be crispy at the edges but still juicy. Cook the asparagus until browned and crisp-tender, 5 to 7 min., depending on thickness. Line four salad plates with the greens. Slice the mushrooms and arrange them and the asparagus on the greens. Drizzle with the dressing and serve.



Grill the endive over coals that are starting to get ashy but are still glowing. Grill only on one side for about 12 minutes. The endive will be crunchy-tender and its leaf edges charred—which is exactly what you're after.

Grilled Endive Salad

Grilling the endive on just one side makes for a delicious mix of charred, silky, and crunchy leaves. Serves four.

4 small heads Belgian endive
Extra-virgin olive oil
Coarse salt
½ lb. arugula, washed, tough stems trimmed
1 lemon, quartered
1½ oz. Parmesan cheese, cut into thin flakes with a knife or vegetable peeler
Freshly ground black pepper

Heat the grill. Remove any wilted or brown-tinged leaves from the heads of endive and halve them lengthwise. Dip them in cold water and shake lightly. Toss with olive oil; sprinkle with coarse salt. Grill the endive on only the cut side over medium-high heat until just tender when pierced with a fork, 10 to 13 min. Arrange the arugula on four salad plates and set the endive halves on top. Drizzle with a little more olive oil and a squeeze of lemon; top with the shaved Parmesan and freshly ground black pepper and serve.

Beth Dooley is a food writer in Minneapolis. Lucia Watson is the chef at Lucia's, also in Minneapolis. They're always glad when the weather gets warm enough to start grilling summer salads. ♦

Grilled Endive Salad couldn't be simpler. With just a squeeze of lemon, some shaved Parmesan, and a few twists of the pepper mill, you've got salad. Arugula adds contrast and bite.



For a change from traditional cuts, try skirt steak. This flavorful cut knows how to show off seasonings, as with this Korean-style marinated version.



Easy-Cooking Skirt Steak Is Full of Flavor

Pound it thin, add a rub or a marinade, and use intense heat for quick-cooking, juicy beef

BY RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN

I'm the chef and owner of a steakhouse in Dallas, so you'd probably assume that filet, sirloin, and rib-eye are what I usually eat at home. Not so. I love those cuts for sure, but skirt steak—easy, quick, and tasty—is often what I eat for dinner.

Skirt steak is a long belt of meat from the belly of the steer. It's a thin cut with a visible grain, sort of like a loosely woven version of flank steak. You might not reach for this cut because you're probably used to buying more familiar types of steak. But skirt steak is a big treat when you cook it right. Sear or grill it quickly, slice it thin, and you'll have a lean, juicy steak with plenty of flavor.

FATTY-LOOKING SKIRT STEAK IS LEAN UNDERNEATH

In the grocery store, look for cuts labeled "beef plate skirt steak" or just "skirt steak." Be sure to buy only choice or prime grades. Steaks labeled "select" tend to be less tasty and much tougher. A one-pound skirt steak will feed four people; there's little waste.

For good flavor, look for a fairly fatty piece of skirt steak. Underneath that top layer of fat, which you'll cut off, the meat will be quite lean but marbled with a few small channels of fat. Leave them be—they'll melt away during cooking, and they'll go a long way toward good taste.

Pound the steaks flat for even cooking and tender texture



Trim the top layer of fat from the steak. Under that fat lies a lean, tasty piece of meat. The little channels of fat will melt away, leaving behind lots of flavor.



Slice the steak into even portions. Smaller pieces are easier to pound and to slice for serving.



Pound the steak $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Pounding helps even out the meat so it cooks faster and is easier to slice. It will be more tender, too.

POUND GENTLY, FLAVOR MODERATELY

After you trim the fat from the skirt steak, cut it into equal portions. This makes pounding easier.

Pound skirt steak into evenly shaped pieces. Skirt is a long, tapered piece of meat, and pounding it will give it a thinner, more uniform shape that's easier to cook and to slice. Pound the meat with the flat side of a meat mallet until the steak is about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. That may seem thin, but the steak pulls back together as it cooks. Pounding also tenderizes the meat by breaking down connective tissue.

Scoring after pounding is another way to tenderize, and it keeps the meat from shrinking too much as it cooks. The downside of scoring is that you may end up with a less juicy piece of steak because the cuts will let more juices out. To score, etch shallow, crosshatched cuts in the steak about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch apart with the tip of a sharp knife.

Add a rub or marinade. Unlike more tender cuts of meat with subtler flavor (like filet), skirt steak has

full flavor that comes through loud and clear. And it benefits from full flavorings, as long as you go easy. Asian-style marinades, spice rubs, or peppercorn crusts are delicious. Olive oil, fresh herbs, lemon, capers, and red wine all work well. I've tried mustard rubs on skirt, but they tend to overpower.

Skirt steak needs just a short marinating time. It's quite porous and takes on flavors faster than just about any other cut of meat. Don't leave skirt in a marinade for too long (a 20-minute dunk should be the maximum) or the meat flavors will get lost.

There are two rules for cooking skirt steak: cook it hot and cook it fast.

FLASH THE STEAK

IN A HOT PAN

There are two important rules when you're cooking skirt steak—cook it at high heat, and cook it quickly. Because the meat is thin, it's quite easy to overcook it. Searing the outside is important: you'll get good flavor outside and meat that isn't overcooked inside.

Sear the meat quickly in a sizzling skillet or over the red-hot coals of a grill. Both ways work well; just remember not to cook the meat beyond medium rare. Past that, the steak dries out quickly. Hot meat will continue to cook even after it's off the heat, so it's better to undercook skirt steak by a half a minute or so. You should see a very rosy pink center when you cut into the meat.

Stay away from broiling skirt; most home broilers can't deliver the intense jolt of heat you're looking for.

Let the meat rest for a few minutes before you serve it. Searing the steak forces the juices to the center of the meat. The resting period allows the juices to seep back into the rest of the meat so you'll get a juicier, tastier result. Keep the steak under a tent of foil so it stays warm.

Cut skirt steak in thin slices. You can slice it either with or across the grain, but whichever way you slice it, slice it thin. Some people find that skirt sliced against the grain is more tender and less chewy. Try it both ways to see which you prefer.

Tex-Mex Skirt Steak

Serve this spicy steak plain or fajita style, with warm flour tortillas, salsa, and guacamole. Serves four.

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. chili powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. cumin seeds, toasted and ground

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. minced garlic

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. chopped fresh oregano (optional)

$\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. cayenne

1 Tbs. vegetable oil; more for the pan

1 lb. skirt steak, trimmed and cut into four portions

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

2 limes; one halved, one cut into wedges for garnish

A splash of balsamic vinegar makes a simple, tasty sauce. Serve seared Skirt Steak with Rosemary, Black Pepper & Balsamic Vinegar over arugula.

A Tex-Mex rub gives a spicy kick to skirt steak. Coating the steaks on just one side means a delicious balance of spice and meat flavors.

Combine the chili powder, cumin, garlic, salt, oregano, cayenne, and oil. Cover the steaks with plastic wrap



Skirt Steak with Rosemary, Black Pepper & Balsamic Vinegar

Crush the peppercorns under a heavy skillet for a coarser texture. Serves four.

- 1 lb. skirt steak, trimmed and cut into four portions**
- 4½ tsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary**
- 1½ tsp. finely crushed black peppercorns**
- ¾ tsp. salt**
- 2 tsp. vegetable oil**
- ½ cup balsamic vinegar**
- 8 oz. arugula, tough stems removed, leaves washed and dried**

Cover the steaks with plastic wrap and gently pound them $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick with the flat side of a meat mallet. Combine the rosemary, pepper, and salt, and press it onto the skirt steaks. Coat a large skillet with the oil and set it over high heat. When the oil is just barely smoking, add the meat, lower the heat slightly, and sear the steaks (in batches if necessary) for 2 to 3 min. on each side for medium rare. The steaks should be very rosy pink. Transfer the meat to a cutting board and tent with foil. With tongs or a spoon, pick any blackened bits out of the pan and discard. Lower the heat to medium and add the vinegar—it will bubble furiously, and the fumes will be sharp at first. Raise the heat and bring the vinegar to a boil. Continue boiling, stirring and rubbing with a wooden spoon to dislodge any brown bits stuck to the pan, until the vinegar is reduced to about 3 Tbs., about 5 min. Stir in any juices collected from the meat. Cut the steaks into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices. Divide the arugula among four plates and arrange the meat slices on top. Spoon the sauce over the meat and the greens and serve.

Korean-Style Marinated Skirt Steak

I like to sear this one, but it's equally delicious grilled; just be sure to oil the grill first so the meat doesn't stick. Serves four.

- 2 Tbs. sugar**
- 3 Tbs. soy sauce**
- 2 tsp. sake (optional)**
- 4 large cloves garlic, finely chopped**
- 5 scallions (white part only), minced**
- 2 tsp. finely chopped fresh ginger**
- 2 tsp. toasted sesame oil**
- 1 lb. skirt steak, trimmed and cut into four portions**
- 2 tsp. vegetable oil**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

Combine the sugar, soy sauce, sake, garlic, scallions, ginger, and sesame oil in a medium-size flat dish or a zip-top bag, stirring to make sure the sugar is dissolved. Cover the steaks with plastic wrap and gently pound them $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick with the flat side of a meat mallet. Add them to the marinade and let them sit for 20 min., covered, turning them once after 10 min. Coat a large skillet with the vegetable oil and set it over high heat until the oil is just barely smoking. Sprinkle both sides of the meat with salt and pepper, add the meat to the pan, lower the heat slightly, and sear the steaks (in batches if necessary) for 2 to 3 min. on each side for medium rare. The steaks should be very rosy pink. Transfer them to a cutting board, tent with foil, and let rest for 3 min. Cut the steaks into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices and serve.

and gently pound them $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick with the flat side of a meat mallet. Sprinkle salt and pepper on each side of the steaks and rub the spice mixture into one side. Lightly coat a large skillet with about 2 tsp. oil and set the pan over high heat. When the oil is just barely smoking, add the steaks, uncoated side down; lower the heat slightly and sear the meat for 3 min. (Cook the meat in batches if necessary.) Turn the steaks and sear them on the coated side for 2 to 3 min. for medium rare. (Check by feeling it, if you're experienced, or cut into the meat to look at the color—it should be very rosy pink.) Transfer the steaks to a cutting board, squeeze the juice from the halved lime over it, tent with foil, and let rest for 3 min. Cut the steaks into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices, garnish with the lime wedges if you like, and serve.

Richard Chamberlain is the chef/owner of Chamberlain's Prime Chop House in Dallas. ♦

The Season Is Ripe for Tomato Soups

An icy gazpacho, a spicy broth with chicken and couscous, and a creamy classic make the best of summer's favorite vegetable

BY JOANNE WEIR

When tomato season finally arrives, I find the colorful displays of ripe tomatoes at the farmers' market impossible to resist. I inevitably come home with baskets full of tomatoes of every hue. My favorite solution to the problem of too many tomatoes is to make tomato soup. Any tomatoes that are so ripe they're about to burst or that are less than salad-perfect go straight into the soup pot.

MEDITERRANEAN-INSPIRED SOUPS

Though actually a New World fruit, tomatoes are now considered one of the most Mediterranean of vegetables. For the soups I'm making here, I've found inspiration from all over that region. The vivid yellow gazpacho, while not absolutely authentic, draws on the traditional chilled, bread-thickened soups of Spain. A spicy tomato broth with couscous and chicken borrows from the flavors of North African cuisine. Redolent with turmeric, cumin, and cinnamon, this soup gets its fire from the Moroccan chile paste known as *harissa*.

One of my favorite tomato soups is made only with tomatoes, onions, a bit of stock, and cream, infused with fresh basil and fortified with a dash of

balsamic vinegar. British food writer Jane Grigson calls basil and tomatoes "soul mates," and I have to agree. This is an ideal soup for a rainy August afternoon or the first cool September evening.

THE BEST SOUP TOMATOES ARE FAT AND READY TO BURST

Always pick the brightest, ripest tomatoes for soup. They'll have the most flavor. A good tomato is heavy for its size and has smooth, unblemished skin.

The best place to find a good tomato is in your own garden. A farmers' market or a roadside stand is a good second choice. Ask and the farmer will likely cut a slice of tomato for you to sample. Little or no core and a moderate amount of seeds in the jelly-like pulp are signs that you've found a flavorful tomato.

You'll rarely find juicy, ripe tomatoes at your supermarket—they'd never survive the trip from the farm. Instead, most large chain stores buy green tomatoes that are gas-ripened. They're tasteless and have a mealy, unpleasant texture.

At home, store tomatoes at room temperature. Never refrigerate tomatoes—cold temperatures destroy their flavor. If the tomatoes are at the peak of



Photos except where noted: Rita Maas. Photo at left: Holly Stewart.

"Soups are a terrific way to use an overabundance of tomatoes," says Joanne Weir. "Any bruised or less than salad-perfect ones can go into the soup pot."



A cold bowl of gazpacho is the perfect antidote to a hot summer afternoon. Sometimes called a "liquid salad," it's one of the most refreshing soups.



ripeness, use them within a day or two. Less than ripe ones will change from orange to red, and their sugar and acid content will continue to increase. They should be at their prime within a week or less.

Yellow Gazpacho with Sourdough Croutons

Crunchy sourdough croutons, cucumbers, peppers, and cherry tomatoes make a lively garnish for this flavorful soup. If you can't find yellow tomatoes, use red ones for an equally delicious version. Yields about 9 cups.

3½ lb. ripe yellow tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
1 yellow bell pepper, cored, seeded, and coarsely chopped
1 red onion, coarsely chopped
1 cucumber, peeled, seeded, and chopped

¼ cup white-wine vinegar
3 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 slice stale bread (crust removed), soaked in water and squeezed dry
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE GARNISH:

1 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
3 cloves garlic, crushed
6 slices sourdough bread (crusts removed), torn into ¾-inch pieces
¼ cup diced green bell pepper
¼ cup peeled, seeded, and chopped cucumber
1½ cups cherry tomatoes, quartered (use a mix of colors)
¼ cup diced red onion

In a bowl, mix the tomatoes, yellow pepper, onion, cucumber, vinegar, garlic, olive oil, and bread. In a blender, purée the mixture in batches at high speed until very smooth, about 3 min. Pass through a coarse strainer. Stir in 2½ tsp. salt and ½ tsp. pepper. Refrigerate until well chilled, at least 1 hour. Taste and add more salt and pepper if needed.

To make the garnish—Heat the oven to 375°F. In a small saucepan, melt the butter in the oil over medium-high heat. Add the crushed garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until the garlic is a light golden color, about 1 min. Discard the garlic. Spread the torn pieces of bread in a single layer on a baking sheet, drizzle with the butter and oil mixture and toss well. Bake, tossing the bread cubes occasionally, until golden, 10 to 12 min.

To serve—Ladle the chilled soup into serving bowls and garnish with the toasted bread, green pepper, cucumber, tomatoes, and red onion.

Peel and seed tomatoes for smoother soups

When making tomato soups, you want just the flavorful meat of the tomato. The tough peels and bitter seeds should be discarded before you begin.



Blanch the tomatoes in a large pot of boiling water. Remove the tomatoes after a minute or two and immediately transfer them to a bowl of ice water.



When the tomatoes are cool enough to handle, simply peel away the skin. Loosened from their bath in the boiling water, the skins will slip right off.



Cut the tomatoes in half and squeeze out the seeds. Don't worry about crushing the tomatoes; they'll be chopped or puréed when you make your soup.

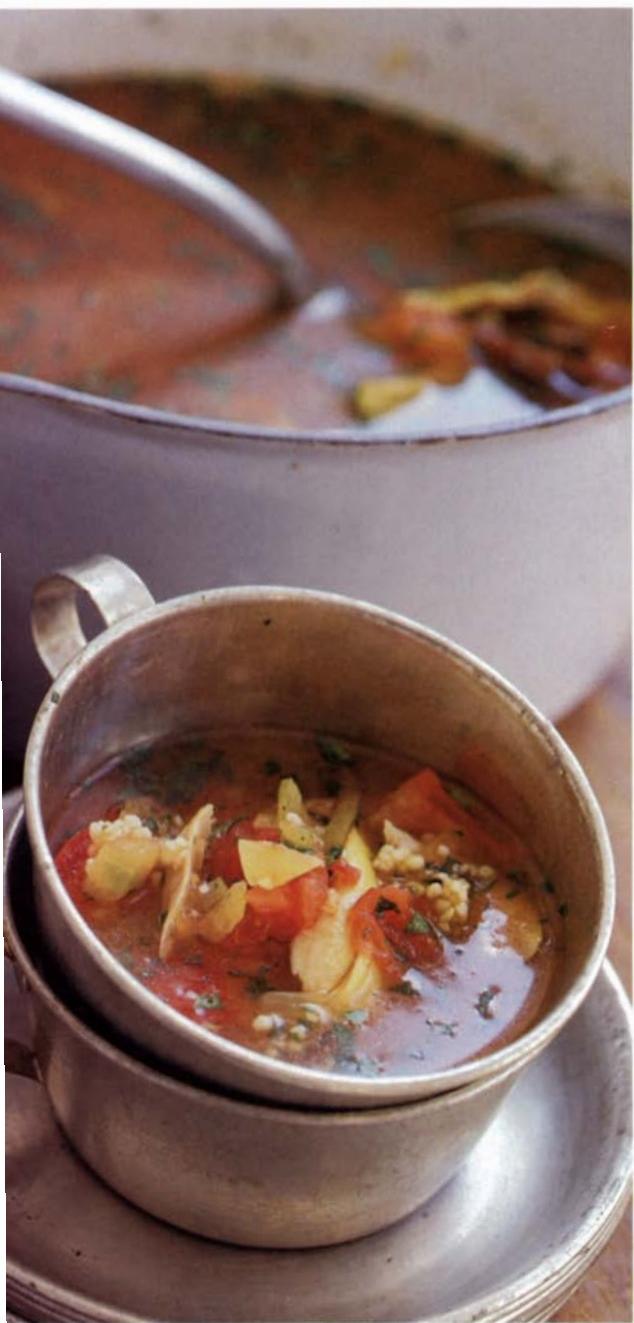
Spicy Tomato Broth with Couscous & Chicken

Harissa is a fiery condiment used in many North African dishes. If you can't find it, use cayenne instead. Stir in the couscous just before serving the soup. If it sits for too long, the couscous will absorb all the broth. Don't use instant couscous—it will turn to mush. Yields about 12 cups.

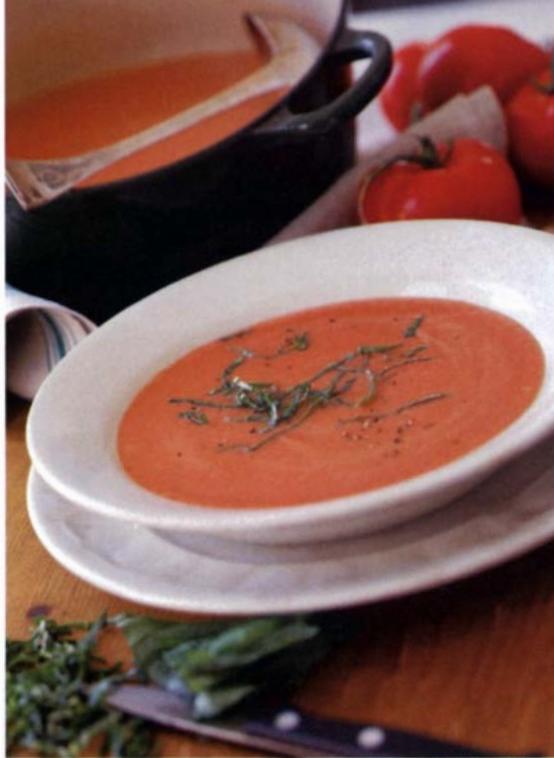
1 Tbs. olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
3 lb. chicken thighs, skinned
1½ tsp. ground cumin
½ tsp. sweet paprika
¼ tsp. turmeric
1 cinnamon stick
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
7 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock
½ tsp. harissa or ¼ tsp. cayenne; more to taste
2 Tbs. tomato paste
3 medium red tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
½ cup couscous (not instant)

**1/4 cup chopped fresh mint
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
2 tsp. fresh lemon juice**

In a large soup pot, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 7 min. Add the chicken thighs, cumin, paprika, turmeric, cinnamon stick, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt, and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pepper. Cook, stirring, for about 2 min. Add the stock, *harissa*, tomato paste, and tomatoes. Cover and simmer gently until the chicken is cooked and falls easily from the bone, about 45 min. Take out the cinnamon stick and discard it. Remove the chicken from the broth and let cool. Skim any fat from the surface of the broth. Pull all the chicken meat from the bones; discard the bones. Tear the meat into 1-inch pieces and stir the



Couscous and chicken give this earthy, peppery soup substance. Serve it with a salad for an easy, comforting, and satisfying meal.



An infusion of basil lends this creamy tomato soup an irresistible Provençal perfume. Balsamic vinegar brings the flavors into focus.

chicken back into the soup. Over medium-high heat, bring the soup to a gentle boil. Stir the soup constantly as you slowly add the couscous. Reduce the heat to low, add the mint and cilantro, and simmer, uncovered, until the couscous is tender, about 5 min. Stir in the lemon juice. Taste and add salt and pepper if needed.

Creamy Tomato-Basil Soup

Sweet vine-ripened tomatoes are the key to flavor in this creamy soup. If your tomatoes are not at their peak of sweetness, add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sugar to the soup. *Yields about 8 cups.*

**1 Tbs. olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
6 sprigs fresh basil
4 lb. ripe red tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
4 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 cup heavy cream
2 tsp. balsamic vinegar
1/2 cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves**

In a large soup pot, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 7 min. Tie the basil sprigs together with a piece of kitchen twine. Add the basil, tomatoes, chicken stock, $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt, and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pepper to the onions. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce the heat to medium low and let simmer until reduced by one-quarter, about 20 min. Let cool. Remove the basil sprigs.

In a blender, purée the soup in batches until very smooth, at least 3 min. Strain the soup into a clean pot and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Remove from the heat; stir in the cream and balsamic vinegar. Taste and add salt and pepper if needed. Just before serving, cut the basil leaves into very thin slices. Ladle the hot soup into bowls and garnish with the fresh basil.

Joanne Weir grows tomatoes at her home in San Francisco. She's a cooking teacher and the author of the forthcoming book, You Say Tomato (Broadway Books, 1998). ♦

Vibrant Salsas Enliven



Grilled Corn & Tomato Salsa
bursts with a bold blend of sweet and hot flavors. For the best texture, cut the main ingredients into even-size pieces.

With a sharp knife and a little imagination, you can make lively salsas to pair with smoky food hot off the grill

BY LIZ DOBBS

Summer is salsa season. Lighting the kitchen stove becomes unthinkable, and when deciding what to have for dinner, my first question is “Can I cook it on the grill?” But sometimes grilled fish steaks or plain pork chops are just too simple, and I want something to perk up their flavor. Salsas are the perfect solution. Fresh and light, their lively combinations of tastes, textures, and hues bring ordinary grilled foods to life.

THE BEST SALSAS BALANCE FLAVOR, TEXTURE, AND COLOR

Every ingredient in a salsa has a job to do, often more than one. Think about what each ingredient will do and also what might be needed to balance its flavor, texture, and color. If it's sweet, add something tart. Acidity is important in balancing the elements in a salsa. Natural fruit juices—lime, orange, grapefruit—deliver a fruity punch and enhance the flavors of other ingredients. For mellow tones, try balsamic or rice vinegar.

Smooth fruits like avocado need a crisp contrast to give the salsa some bite. Fresh herbs add an extra dimension to salsas while uniting the flavors. Bright colors are accented by dark ones. Spicy chiles seek a mellow counterpoint to tame their heat. Jalapeños and serranos are often used in salsas, but they contribute more than just heat: their peppery crunchiness boosts texture and adds a fresh-tasting spiciness. Onions and garlic play a similar role.

Consider the mango salsa recipe here. The mango's sweetness would be cloying

Grilled Foods

without the acidity of the lime juice. Crunchy bits of jícama add interest to an otherwise smooth blend, while the cool freshness of the fruit is a foil to the fire of the jalapeño. Black beans lend their own flavor and texture to the mix and are a striking contrast to the vivid yellow fruit. Mint leaves give a colorful accent as well as a fresh herbal touch. All these things contribute to a perfectly balanced salsa.

CHOOSE FRESH, RIPE, AND COLORFUL INGREDIENTS

Lifeless produce makes a lifeless salsa. At the peak of the summer harvest, when produce is ripe, plentiful, and cheap, there's no reason not to use the very best.

Choose produce that's ripe but firm so it retains its texture. I like to use plum tomatoes for salsas. Sliced lengthwise, they're easy to dice, and they have fewer seeds and less pulp than other varieties.

LET SALSAS STAND BEFORE SERVING

Let your salsa stand for 15 to 20 minutes before you serve it. Given a chance to mingle, the flavors will deepen. Most salsas are best eaten within a few hours of being made. If they sit too long, the acidic ingredients will "cook" the salsa, ruining its texture. Also, ingredients such as raw garlic, onions, and chiles will oxidize, making their flavors overly sharp.

Serve any salsa only slightly chilled or at room temperature. The flavors will stand out more, and the main course won't be cooled down or upstaged.

Grilled Corn & Tomato Salsa

The smoky heat of the chipotle chile makes this salsa a bold accompaniment to grilled beef, pork, or chicken. Yields about 2½ cups.

**2 ears corn, husked
Olive oil for brushing
5 ripe plum tomatoes
¼ cup very finely diced red onion
1 tsp. finely chopped garlic
1 canned chipotle chile, finely chopped
1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh oregano or 2 tsp. dried
2 Tbs. fresh lime juice
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp. salt; more to taste**

Heat the grill. Brush the corn with olive oil and grill over medium-hot coals until tender and slightly blackened, about 10 min. Scrape the kernels from the cob and reserve. Grill the tomatoes over medium-hot coals until the skins are blistered and charred, about 8 min. Slice the tomatoes lengthwise and dice.

In a serving bowl, combine the corn, tomatoes, onion, garlic, chipotle, oregano, lime juice, and extra-virgin olive oil. Season with salt. Let stand for 20 min. before serving.

Mango, Jícama & Black Bean Salsa

Jícama (pronounced HEE-kah-mah) is a big, beige, roundish tuber with a tough skin and a



Tender avocado and crisp cucumber and red pepper make a lively mix of texture and flavor. Gently stir in the avocado just before serving so it stays green and holds its shape.

sweet, crisp, almost apple-like flavor. Look for it in the produce section. Yields about 2½ cups.

**1½ cups diced mango
¾ cup diced jícama
¾ cup cooked black beans, drained
1 tsp. finely chopped jalapeño
2 tsp. finely chopped fresh mint
½ cup finely chopped red onion
2 tsp. fresh lime juice
2 tsp. rice vinegar
½ tsp. salt; more to taste**

In a food processor or blender, purée ½ cup of the diced mango until smooth. In a serving bowl, combine the remaining diced mango, the jícama, beans, jalapeño, mint, onion, lime juice, and vinegar. Gently stir in the mango purée. Season with salt. Let stand for 20 min. before serving.

Avocado, Cucumber & Red Pepper Salsa

This clean, fresh flavor combination goes well with fish, chicken, or lamb. Yields about 2 cups.

**½ cup diced seeded cucumber
1 small red pepper, diced (about 1 cup)
3 scallions, finely chopped (about ¼ cup)
1 small jalapeño, cored, seeded, and finely chopped
2 tsp. chopped cilantro
1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
1 Tbs. rice vinegar
½ tsp. salt; more to taste
1 medium avocado, diced (about 1 cup)**

In a serving bowl, mix the cucumber, red pepper, scallions, jalapeño, cilantro, lime juice, vinegar, and salt. Gently toss in the avocado. Let stand for 20 min. before serving.



Liz Dobbs, former co-owner and chef of Benny's Burritos in New York City, is a cook who specializes in Mexican foods. ♦



When It Comes to Angel Food Cake, God Is in the Details

Properly whipped egg whites and two kinds of sugar make a high-rising cake that's tender and light

BY FLO BRAKER

I'm a member of a group of bakers that meets to discuss everything from the nuts and bolts of small-business baking to our favorite brands of butter. With so much in common, some of us wondered what would happen if we all baked a cake following the same recipe. Would we end up with identical cakes?

We decided to find out. Everyone in the group baked an angel food cake following one member's favorite recipe. The results were dramatic. The 35 participants showed up with 35 completely different cakes. Some were five inches tall, others three inches short; some stood straight, others were lopsided; there were brown cakes, tan cakes, and ones that were pristine white; smooth cakes, crumbly cakes; tender ones and chewy ones. As one observer noted, "The only thing they had in common was a hole in the middle."

Seeing all those cakes side by side convinced me that to make a great angel food cake you need more than a good, well-balanced recipe—you also need a solid understanding of baking techniques. After years of testing different proportions and methods, I've found that several things are essential to an angel food cake's success. First, the ingredients: cake flour and a combination of confectioners' and granulated sugar ensure a delicate texture, while fresh, slightly cool egg whites provide a tall, well-structured cake. Next, the techniques: how you handle those ingredients determines whether your cake is tall and tender or flat and chewy. Carefully whipping the whites and gently folding in the dry ingredients provide the most



"A properly baked angel food cake will leave its golden crust in the pan," says Flo Braker. "The pristine white cake will come out cleanly and beautifully, like a pillow taken out of a slipcover."

THE SMART WAY TO SEPARATE EGGS

When separating eggs, it's important that none of the yolks mix with the whites. Yolks contain fat, and even a tiny amount of fat will ruin an egg white's ability to trap and hold air.

- ◆ Eggs separate best when they're cold, right out of the refrigerator.



- ◆ Before you begin, set three bowls or containers on the counter in front of you. Crack an egg and separate the white into one bowl, put the yolk in the second bowl, and then pour the cleanly separated white into the third. Repeat with each egg. That way, if a yolk breaks or an egg is spoiled, you won't contaminate the entire batch of whites.

- ◆ If you spot a small speck of yolk in the whites, use a clean egg shell to scoop it out; it will attract the yolk like a magnet.

volume and tenderness. Baking the cake at the right temperature allows it to fully expand and bake through before the cake's structure is set.

CAKE FLOUR MAKES A TENDER CAKE; SUGAR MAKES IT STABLE

For a fine-crumbbed, tender angel food cake, use cake flour. Because it's low in protein, there's less gluten, which can toughen a cake. And cake flour's fine particles are especially easy to fold into the batter.

I like to use a combination of granulated and confectioners' sugar to take advantage of the best properties of each. Adding granulated sugar to the egg whites makes a meringue, which gives you a more stable and much airier foam than egg whites alone. But if you use too much sugar or add it too quickly, a heavy syrup will form, which would burden the whites and weigh down the cake as it bakes.

Confectioners' sugar dissolves too quickly when added to egg whites. Rather than form a stable foam, it makes an icing-like mixture. But when added to the dry ingredients, confectioners' sugar helps disperse the flour particles more evenly, making it easier to fold into the egg whites. Its minuscule grains make a tender, close-grained cake.

UNDERWHIP THE WHITES FOR A LOFTIER CAKE

Egg whites provide the sole leavening for angel food cake, so they must be whipped correctly. Whites that are whipped soft, not stiff, ensure a high-rising cake.

Freshly separated egg whites give the best aeration and structure. Most of the volume in an angel food cake comes from the steam produced by the evaporation of the liquid from the egg whites. As the steam passes through the air cells, the cells expand and lift the batter. Egg whites that have been frozen or refrigerated after they've been separated lose moisture, and their proteins begin to deteriorate so they don't expand as much.

Whites whip best when they're about 60°F. Separate your eggs while they're still cold from the refrigerator and let them stand at room temperature for about an hour. Whites whipped at this stage are viscous, the bubbles that form hold air better, and the whites are less likely to overwhip. Room-temperature whites (about 70°F) whip more quickly, but there's a greater risk of overwhipping them.

Whip the whites to their optimum, not maximum, capacity. Properly whipped whites incorporate easily with the other ingredients and continue to expand in the oven. The batter should be fluffy but fluid, pourable rather than spoonable. If you whip the whites too stiff, incorporating the dry ingredients will require extra folding, and the batter will lose volume.



Whip the egg whites until they're droopy and soft. Whites provide the sole leavening for angel food cake, so it's vital that they're whipped properly.

Also, the overextended air cells are more likely to collapse in the oven; the cake will be tough and chewy rather than melt-in-your-mouth tender.

Whip the whites in a clean, deep bowl. Any equipment that comes in contact with the whites—the bowl, beaters or whisk attachment, and spatula—must be absolutely grease-free. Even trace amounts of fat can destroy an egg white's ability to trap and hold air. Wipe all your equipment with a paper towel dampened with a bit of white vinegar just to be sure.

A deep stainless-steel bowl with at least a four-quart capacity allows for the increased volume of the whites once they're whipped. Plastic bowls are hard to keep grease-free, and glass bowls are slippery.

Egg whites that are whipped soft, not stiff, ensure a high-rising cake.

GENTLE FOLDING KEEPS AIR IN THE WHITES

The trick to folding is to gently combine the dry ingredients with the egg whites while retaining as much of the aerated volume as possible. Sprinkling the dry ingredients over the whipped whites, rather than dumping them on top, keeps the flour mixture from clumping and deflating the whites.

Here's my folding technique:

- ◆ Hold a rubber spatula, rounded edge down, over the center of the bowl, with the blade facing you.
- ◆ Cut straight down into the mixture, pull along the bottom and up the side of the bowl nearest you, and with a flick of the wrist, lift the mixture up and over itself, letting it fall gently back into the bowl.
- ◆ Give the bowl a quarter turn; repeat the gesture.

A few times during the process, bring the spatula up through the surface and check to make sure that the dry ingredients are being evenly distributed. Because the flour mixture and the whites are the same



Since the flour mixture and the whites are the same color, it's hard to tell when they're completely folded. Bring the spatula up through the whites to see if the flour is evenly distributed.



The batter should be fluffy but fluid enough to pour. Use an ungreased pan so the batter won't slip down the sides as it bakes.

color, it can be difficult to know when the folding is complete. Fold no more than is necessary to incorporate the dry ingredients into the egg whites.

THE RIGHT OVEN TEMPERATURE ENSURES A HIGH-RISING CAKE

The ideal temperature for baking angel food cake is 325°F. Once the cake is in the oven, the sugar interacts with the whites and with the flour proteins. If the oven is too cool, the sugar will absorb liquid from the whites, turn syrupy, and weep out of the batter, pulling down the air cells and decreasing the cake's volume. On the other hand, if the oven is too hot, the cake's outer structure will set before the cake can fully expand and bake through, making it dense and short.

Towards the end of the baking time, as the cake reaches its full height and turns golden, a few cracks

may appear on the surface. Though the structure is set, the cake may settle about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in the pan as the steam dissipates. When the surface is golden and springs back when you touch it lightly, the cake is done. Don't use the toothpick test: it can fool you on an angel food cake. The toothpick can slip right through the porous batter and come out clean even if the cake hasn't finished baking.

Angel Food Cake

Sugared berries are a lovely topping for this most ethereal of cakes. Amounts for flour and confectioners' sugar are listed by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups); use either measurement. *Yields one 10-inch cake; serves about ten.*

**1½ cups (12 to 13) cold egg whites
3½ oz. (1 cup) sifted cake flour
5 oz. (1½ cups) confectioners' sugar
¼ tsp. salt
1½ tsp. cream of tartar
1 cup granulated sugar
1 tsp. vanilla extract
2 tsp. finely grated lemon zest**

Heat the oven to 325°F. Put the egg whites in the bowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer. Set aside until the whites are slightly below room temperature, 60°F, about 1 hour.

Sift the cake flour, confectioners' sugar, and salt onto a sheet of waxed paper; set aside.

Whip the whites on medium-low speed until frothy. Add the cream of tartar; turn the speed to medium. Continue whipping until soft peaks form. In a slow, continuous stream, add the granulated sugar, whipping until the whites thicken and form soft, droopy peaks. In the final moments of whipping, add the vanilla and lemon zest. The mixture should be fluffy but fluid enough to pour.

Sprinkle one-quarter of the flour mixture over the whites and, using a rubber spatula, gently fold the dry ingredients into the whites. Continue folding in the flour mixture, one-quarter at a time, until it has all been added.

Gently pour the batter into an ungreased 10-inch tube pan. Bake in the bottom third of the oven until the top is light golden and the cake feels spongy and springs back when touched, 45 to 50 min. Invert the pan onto the neck of a bottle or a funnel and let cool completely before removing from the pan.

To remove the cake from the pan, tilt the pan on its side and gently tap the bottom against the counter to loosen the cake. Rotate the pan, tapping a few more times as you turn it, until the cake comes free from the sides of the pan. Lift the cake from the pan. It should come out cleanly, leaving the crust on the sides of the pan. To serve, use a serrated knife and cut with a gentle sawing motion. Top with sugared berries, if you like.



Once the cake is out of the oven, turn it upside down immediately. The structure won't be completely set until the cake has cooled. Left upright, it would quickly deflate.

Flo Braker is the author of The Simple Art of Perfect Baking (updated and revised, Chapters, 1992) and Sweet Miniatures: The Art of Making Bite-Size Desserts (William Morrow, 1991). ♦



Like most homemade pastas, orecchiette dough begins with a well. But this pasta contains just water and flour, and some of the flour is semolina.



Use your fingers to mix the water and flour. Add the water a little at a time until you have a soft, sticky dough.

Making Robust, Flavorful Orecchiette Pasta

An easy method turns an eggless dough into chewy and delicious “little ears” of pasta —try them with three quick sauces

BY NATALIE DANFORD

When I first tasted handmade orecchiette in the Apulia region of southern Italy, I had an epiphany, one of those moments when you know you’re tasting “the real thing.” As soon as I bit into one of the irregularly shaped rounds (*orecchiette* means “little ears” in Italian), I was hooked. The slightly chewy disks were the perfect foil to the robust sauce they were tossed in, made from bitter broccoli raab, fragrant garlic, and salty anchovies. The pasta’s cupped shape held drops of the sauce, while its sturdy texture kept it from getting soggy.

What set these orecchiette apart from the store-bought kind I’d been eating for years was their fresh flavor and firm yet yielding texture. This pasta was more than simply a vehicle for transporting sauce; it

was an equal element of the dish, as important as the sauce itself. I knew that once I got home, I’d be making my own. Fortunately, orecchiette (pronounced or-eh-KYEH-tay) are simple to make.

THE DOUGH NEEDS HARD FLOUR AND—SURPRISE—WARM WATER

Like people, pasta varieties are products of their environment. Just as the fertile Italian region of Emilia-Romagna has provided the world with rich tortellini, the more rugged Apulia has given us sturdy, no-nonsense orecchiette.

Unlike most homemade pastas, which contain eggs, orecchiette are made from just flour and water. The lack of eggs and the use of semolina flour, which is harder than white flour, contribute to the pasta’s pleasingly firm bite.

I blend the semolina with all-purpose flour. You can find semolina flour, which is made from hard



Roll a golfball-size chunk of dough into a log and slice it into thin rounds. Keep the rest of the dough wrapped so it won't dry out.

durum wheat, in many supermarkets and specialty food stores, or you can order it from sources such as Dean & DeLuca in New York (800/221-7714) or Butte Creek Mill in Oregon (541/826-3531).

The dough is made like any other pasta dough, by shaping the flour into a well, putting the liquid in the middle, and very gradually working in the flour with your fingers or a fork. The surprising difference with this dough is that you use warm water, not cold. The warm water will help to develop more gluten in the flour, making it very elastic.

After the dough is mixed, it needs at least seven minutes of serious kneading. As you knead, the dough may crumble a little; if it does, just wet your hands lightly and continue working.

SHAPING THE PASTA IS THE FUN PART

Orecchiette are easy to shape, but each "ear" must be shaped individually, which takes a little time. The dough dries quickly, so work with one piece at a time, keeping the rest covered with a towel or plastic wrap.

The basic method for shaping the ears is to dimple a small, flat round of dough with your thumb to make a tiny cup or ear. The key is to twist the hand holding the disk of dough, not the thumb that's making the indentation. By the end of a batch of dough, you'll have the technique mastered. And remember that part of orecchiette's charm is the irregular shapes.

COOK RIGHT AWAY OR DRY FOR LATER

You can cook orecchiette immediately while the pasta is still moist, or you can air-dry it until it's hard and store it for at least a couple of months. To dry the pasta, spread the rounds out on floured baking sheets and leave them at room temperature. The time they take to dry depends on humidity and the character of the dough itself, but you should let them dry at least overnight. When they're so hard



A couple of swivels of your hand gives the pasta a cup shape. By pressing down with your thumb, you'll make the center a little thinner than the rim.

Don't worry about making the shapes identical; a little variation is what homemade pasta is all about. Dust the finished orecchiette with some flour to keep the disks from sticking together.



that you can't slice them with a knife, transfer them to covered jars and store them at room temperature.

THE PASTA IS LONG-COOKING, SO THERE'S TIME TO MAKE SAUCE

Because orecchiette don't contain eggs and they're made with hard flour, even a freshly made batch takes longer to cook than homemade egg pasta—about 8 minutes for fresh, 20 minutes for dried—something to keep in mind when you're preparing the quick sauces I offer here. Orecchiette complement most sauces, but those with assertive flavors work best with the pasta's substantial texture.

As with any pasta, use lots of vigorously boiling, generously salted water. The pasta should be cooked through but still have a firm bite. I've found there's only one foolproof method for determining when orecchiette are done—taste several and taste often. When the pasta is done to your liking, drain it and immediately toss it with your sauce.

Basic Orecchiette Pasta

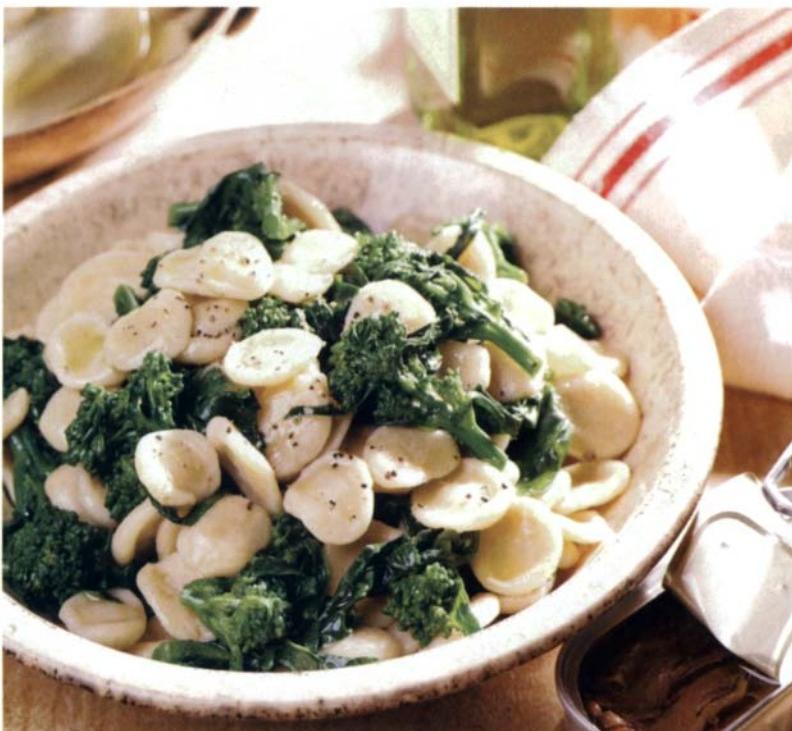
This dough comes out best if you work the water in very slowly; don't try to bring in too much flour at one time. Flour amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups); use either measurement. *Serves four.*

**6 oz. (1 cup) semolina flour
6½ oz. (1½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
⅔ cup warm water**

In a bowl, whisk the flours together well. Mound the flour on a work surface, make a deep well in the center, and pour 2 Tbs. of the water in the center. With two fingers, stir in a little flour from the walls of the well. When the water is absorbed and a paste formed, repeat with more water until you have a soft but not sticky dough.

Knead the dough on a lightly floured surface until it's smooth and supple, 7 to 8 min. If it crumbles during

Orecchiette stand up well to hearty flavors, such as those of bitter broccoli raab, salty anchovies, and heady garlic.



The vibrant flavors of tomato and basil are the soul of this quick sauce. A sprinkling of ricotta salata cheese adds a salty pungency.

kneading, wet your hands to moisten the dough slightly. Cut off a golfball-size chunk of dough; cover the rest with plastic wrap. Roll the chunk into a cylinder about 1 inch in diameter. With a very sharp knife, slice the cylinder into disks about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick.

Pick up a disk. If it's squashed from cutting, squeeze it slightly between your thumb and index finger to return it to a circular shape. Put the disk in the palm of one hand and press down on it with the thumb of your other hand. Swivel your hand (not your thumb) twice to thin the center of the ear, leaving the rim a little thicker. If the dough sticks to your thumb, dip your thumb in a little flour as you work. Repeat with the rest of the dough. As you finish the disks, lay them on a clean dishtowel. When you've shaped an entire cylinder, sprinkle a little flour over the ears and repeat the process with a new chunk of dough. Use immediately with one of the following recipes, or dry the pasta for later use.

Orecchiette with Tomatoes, Basil & Ricotta Salata

Ricotta salata is a firm, slightly salty cheese that's becoming more available in grocery stores. If you can't find it, try feta cheese instead. *Serves four.*

**1 Tbs. salt
1 recipe orecchiette (at left)
3 medium ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and coarsely chopped
2 large cloves garlic, minced
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
½ cup tightly packed fresh basil leaves, sliced into thin strips
¼ cup crumbled ricotta salata**



clove and sauté until browned and fragrant; discard the clove. Add the anchovies and sauté 1 to 2 min., pressing with a wooden spoon to turn them into a paste.

When the pasta is cooked, drain it; add it to the pan along with the broccoli raab and remaining olive oil. Toss for about 1 min. to warm the ingredients and thoroughly coat the pasta. Serve immediately, drizzled with more olive oil, if desired, and seasoned with salt and pepper.

Orecchiette with Mussels & Mint

This somewhat startling coupling of seafood and mint makes sense against a background of supportive, plain pasta. *Serves four.*

1 Tbs. salt
1 recipe orecchiette (opposite)
12 to 16 mussels, scrubbed and debearded
1/2 cup dry white wine
2 medium zucchini, cut into 1-inch matchsticks
1/2 cup heavy cream
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1/4 cup loosely packed fresh mint leaves, chopped

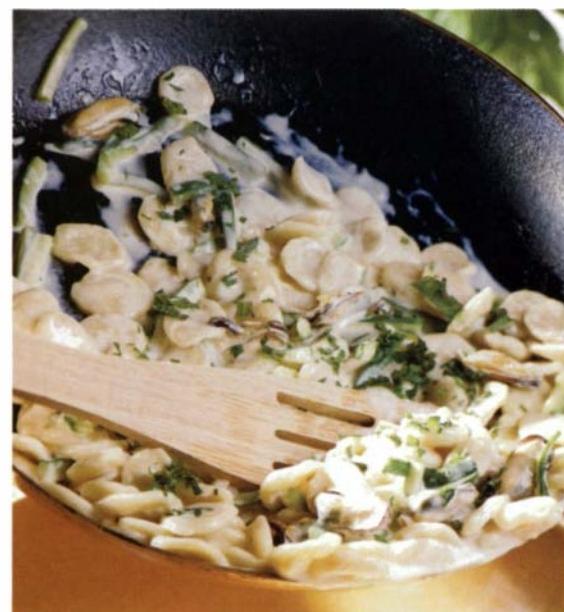
Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the salt and orecchiette and cook until done, about 8 min. for freshly made or about 20 min. for dried.

Put the mussels in a large frying pan with the wine. Cover and bring to a boil. Steam over medium heat until all the mussels have opened, 2 to 3 min. Remove the mussels with a slotted spoon. Strain the mussel broth through a coffee filter or a double layer of cheesecloth and return it to the frying pan. Add the zucchini, cover, bring to a boil, and steam until cooked but not mushy, about 3 min.

Meanwhile, remove the mussels from their shells and set aside. When the zucchini are cooked, add the mussel meats and the cream; simmer until the liquid is thickened and reduced, about 3 min. Season with salt and pepper.

Toss the cooked orecchiette in the cream sauce over the heat until most of the cream is absorbed, about 1 min. Sprinkle with the mint and serve immediately.

Writer Natalie Danford spends part of each year exploring the sights and tastes of Italy. ♦



Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the salt and orecchiette and cook until done, about 8 min. for freshly made or about 20 min. for dried.

Meanwhile, combine the tomatoes, garlic, and olive oil in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper, but keep in mind that the cheese will add more saltiness. (This sauce can be kept at room temperature for several hours and will get more garlicky as it sits.) When the pasta is cooked, drain it and toss it with the tomato mixture. Sprinkle with the basil and cheese and serve immediately.

Orecchiette, Broccoli Raab & Anchovies

This is a classic orecchiette dish. If you can't find salt-packed anchovies, you can use oil-cured ones as long as you rinse them thoroughly. *Serves four.*

1 Tbs. salt
1 bunch broccoli raab, tough stems and outer leaves trimmed
1 recipe orecchiette (opposite)
3 whole salt-packed anchovies or 6 to 8 oil-cured anchovy fillets
4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 large clove garlic, slightly crushed
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the salt and the broccoli raab and boil until tender, 3 to 5 min. Remove the raab with a slotted spoon, reserving the boiling water, and run the raab under cold water to stop the cooking. Squeeze out as much of the water as possible and chop the raab coarsely. Set aside. Let the water return to a boil. Add the orecchiette and cook until done, about 8 min. for freshly made or about 20 min. for dried.

Meanwhile, bone the anchovies if salt-packed or rinse if oil-cured. Pat them dry, chop them, and set them aside. Heat 1 Tbs. of the oil in a large frying pan. Add the garlic

The orecchiette absorbs the cream in this unusual sauce mixing mint and mussels. The result is a luscious texture and a completely infused flavor.



A New England Style Clambake Cooked on a Grill

Savor a true taste of summer with shellfish, chicken, sausage, and vegetables, all kissed with smoke and a sea-salty tang

BY SAM HAYWARD

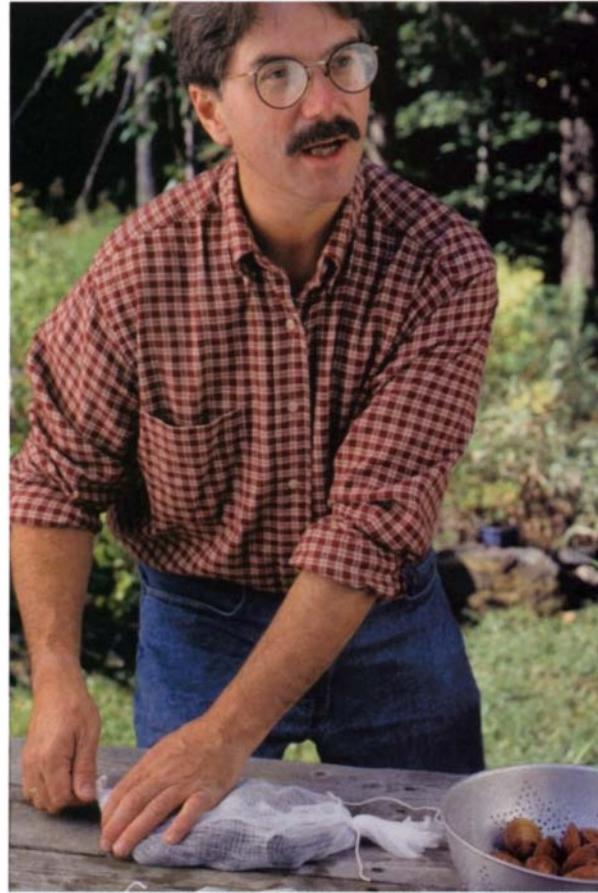
Summer is clambake season where I live on the coast of Maine. Walk along the beach and you're apt to find a stone-lined pit, charred wood, and heaps of cooked seaweed left from a recent clambake. I've always loved the steamy, smoky, salty aroma and taste of these seaside feasts, but a traditional clambake is a laborious all-day affair. At my house, when we want to enjoy this favorite summertime meal without a day at the beach, we fire up the grill in the backyard. By layering fresh seaweed and shellfish over a charcoal fire in a kettle grill, I can simulate the wonderful sea-soaked flavor of a real clambake without the hassle of lugging everything to the beach and digging a fire pit.

A standard 22- to 24-inch kettle grill fits enough food for a clambake for four with all the trimmings—two kinds of clam, mussels, lobsters, chicken, sausages, corn, and potatoes. (While gas grills may be handy for most cookouts, they won't give you the gentle smoky fire needed for a proper clambake.) You can easily subtract or substitute according to your taste or what's available at the mar-

kets in your area. Just remember that a clambake should have a variety of food—and lots of it. This is the kind of meal that you and your guests will linger over: eating a few more clams, then maybe cracking open another lobster claw, perhaps taking another bite of spicy sausage, or nibbling on an ear of fresh corn. Perfect for a long summer afternoon.

YOUR MENU CAN BE FLEXIBLE, BUT DON'T FORGET THE CLAMS

Since clams are so plentiful and delicious here, I like to include two types, as well as mussels, in my clambake. The most common clams for clambakes are "steamer" clams, also called Atlantic soft-shell clams. Along with these, I include at least one kind of hard-shell clam. Cherrystones and littlenecks are typical, but I prefer the little reddish-brown,



Author Sam Hayward brings the seashore to his backyard with summer clambakes on the grill.

triangular shaped mahogany clams for their sweet, slightly salty taste. Razor clams are also delicious, but they aren't often seen in markets. The cultivated mussels now available in seafood markets in most major cities are usually of excellent quality, and their black shells look pretty in contrast with the clams.

KETTLE-GRILL CLAMBAKE MENU FOR FOUR

*Lobsters,
Clams, Steamers,
Mussels,
Chicken Breasts,
Sausages,
Potatoes & Corn*

◆
*Ice-Cold
Watermelon*

pair of scissors and load the clams and mussels onto a platter.

Any Maine clambake worth its sea salt includes lobsters. I use the smallest one-pound lobsters, called chickens,

because they cook in the relatively short cooking time of the clambake. Besides, with so much else to eat, a small lobster gives you the perfect amount for a satisfying taste of its sweet, tender meat.

To remove the rubber bands from the lobster claws before cooking, turn the lobster on its back and grasp its head and claws in your fist, squeezing the arms close together. With your free hand, slide a thin knife under the elastic and angle the blade upward to stretch and pop off the elastic. The lobster may flap its tail rapidly, which can be surprising. Just hold the lobster at a distance to avoid being slapped. Once the bands are removed, only handle the lobster by the back of the shell so that its claws can't reach you.

Round out the menu with meat and potatoes. At my house, we like to add chicken breasts, pork sausage, tiny potatoes, and sweet corn. This way, there's plenty to eat for everyone and the flavors of these different foods complement the

Hardwood makes a long-lasting fire



Start with a clean grill and open all the vents. A chimney starter gets the hardwood charcoal burning fast without lighter fluid. When the coals are glowing, remove the chimney and spread the coals evenly.



Use actual chunks of hardwood for a deeper layer of coals. Add a layer of hardwood chunks onto the glowing charcoal and let them burn down. Repeat with one or two more layers until you have a solid bed of hot coals. Top the chunks with one more layer of charcoal. Let the charcoal ignite and spread it out.



Put on the grill's grid. When 90% of the charcoal is white or luminous red, you're ready for seaweed.

For the best clambake, choose a good mix of ingredients

Quantity

(These amounts serve four hungry people.)

Preparation

4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves	Brush with olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and grill briefly to brown, about 3 min. each side.
4 sausages, such as bratwurst, chorizo, Italian, or other specialty links	Prick with a fork and grill briefly to brown, about 3 min.
4 live lobsters (about 1 lb. each)	Remove claw bands (see text above).
2 lb. clams, preferably a mix of soft-shell "steamers" and a hard-shell variety like mahogany or littleneck	Rinse well (discard any that don't close tightly when tapped) and bundle each variety in a double layer of cheesecloth.
1 lb. mussels	Rinse and scrub well, pull off any tough "beards," and bundle in a double layer of cheesecloth.
4 ears corn	Remove husks and silk.
1½ lb. small new potatoes	Boil in salted water until almost tender, about 5 min.
Lots of butter	Melt for dipping the seafood.
20-lb. sack hardwood lump charcoal (see sources, p. 54)	Use about 1 gallon to start the fire. Add a final layer of charcoal after burning several layers of hardwood chunks.
50 lb. seasoned hardwood chunks (about 5x3-inch chunks) (see sources, p. 54)	Add a layer of wood to the burning charcoal, let it burn down, and repeat several times for a good base of coals.
Heavy-duty aluminum foil	Make a drip tray for the food.
5-gallon bucket fresh rockweed seaweed (see sources, p. 54)	When the fire is ready, arrange an even 2-inch layer of seaweed on the drip tray, leaving at least 1 inch breathing room around the perimeter. Cover the food with another 1-inch layer of seaweed before closing the grill.



Bundle the clams and mussels separately



Shuck the corn



Grill the meats



Remove the lobster bands



Add the drip tray and the seaweed. Fashion a tray from foil (see text at right) and center it on the grill with about 2 inches of space at the edges. Spread a 2-inch layer of seaweed on the tray.

lobsters and clams, all perfumed by steamy wood smoke. Including pork sausages in a clambake is a Portuguese seafarers' tradition, and I love the taste of a highly seasoned sausage like chorizo or hot Italian sausage. For the chicken, boneless, skinless breasts are the easiest to cook (and to eat), and they stay nice and moist with all the steam from the seaweed. When I can find them, I buy boneless breasts with the tiny wing bone attached because I like the way they look when they're cooked, but ordinary boneless breasts will do. Both the chicken and the sausage need to be briefly seared over a hot grill before the seaweed and the other food gets piled on. This gives them a tasty brown crust and ensures that they'll cook thoroughly in the lower heat of the clambake.

BUILD A GENTLE, LONG-LASTING FIRE

The basic idea of the kettle-grill clambake is to layer the food with seaweed over a slow-burning wood fire. The seaweed protects the food from the intense heat of the fire and creates the initial steam to start the cooking. The slower-cooking foods, such as lobster and clams, go on the bottom, while the corn and potatoes (which are parboiled) are the last to go on since they really only need to be warmed up (see

chart at left). Then, with the cover set tightly on the grill, all the food gently steams and smokes for 20 to 25 minutes.

Gather your friends while you build the fire. Once the fire is ready, there's no time to wait for late arrivals. Fill the time by serving cold drinks (see beer sidebar on p. 54) and maybe a few briny fresh oysters on the half shell. Helpful guests can lend a hand by cleaning the clams and mussels outdoors with a garden hose. Don't bother serving substantial appetizers since you want hungry guests when the clambake comes off the grill.

Building a strong fire is essential. Getting a good base of coals and embers before cooking your clambake takes about an hour or so. Without a sufficient fire base, your hot coals may not last long enough to cook all the food. I've found that a combination of hardwood charcoal and actual hardwood chunks works well (see sources on p. 54). The charcoal produces quick, intense heat, while the hardwood chunks burn slowly and give off heat over time.

Start with a clean grill kettle, free of ashes from previous use, with all the air vents open. I avoid smelly liquid charcoal starter fluid and instead use a chimney device with about a gallon of natural hardwood lump charcoal. When the coals are glowing evenly, dump them into the grill and spread the burning coals to form the first layer. Next, add a layer of hardwood chunks, let them burn down until nearly reduced to coals, and then add another layer of hardwood. Depending on the type of wood used, it generally takes 15 to 25 minutes for a single layer to burn down, and I use two or three layers to get a good solid bed of coals.

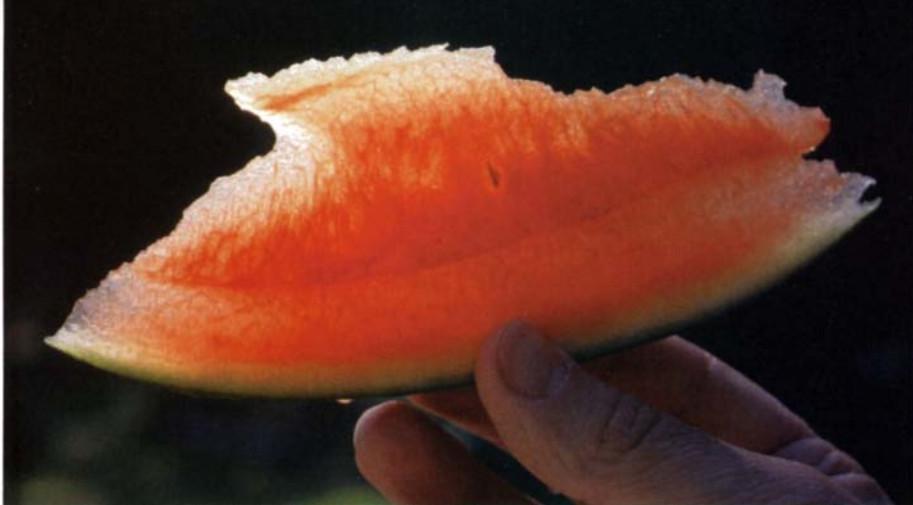
More charcoal makes the final layer. After you've made a good base of hardwood coals, add another layer of charcoal before cooking the clambake. Once this final layer of charcoal is glowing briskly, spread

the fire evenly and put the grill's grid in place. The fire is ready when about 90% of the charcoal has turned from black to either ashen white or luminous red. The fire will be very hot. Use this heat to quickly sear the chicken and sausages, and then quickly start cooking the clambake before the heat dissipates.

Before layering on the seaweed and the food, fit your grill with a tray to protect the fire. As the clambake cooks, the food gives off moisture and steam that can dampen even the sturdiest fire. You'll need a tray or barrier to catch moisture so that it doesn't drip on the fire. You can use heavy-duty aluminum foil (or several layers of regular foil); crimp and fold it into a disk that's slightly smaller than the diameter of the grill. Or use a large, round



A clambake is a long, leisurely affair. Serve all the food on big platters and let your guests help themselves to all the different types of seafood, meat, and vegetables.



Refreshing watermelon is the perfect ending for a casual (but copious) clambake.

aluminum cake pan (like those used for baking large wedding cakes). Be sure to leave about two inches around the perimeter of the disk so the heat can circulate up and around the mound of seaweed and food. The fire also needs air to breathe so it can keep burning.

LAYER THE FOOD ON THE GRILL SO IT ALL COOKS EVENLY

Select and prepare your ingredients from the chart on p. 52. Follow the explanation in the text for building the fire (p. 53), and read the following instructions before beginning to cook, since speed will be important. Have all the ingredients near the fire as you begin layering the food.

♦ Lay the lobsters on their backs on the seaweed bed, keeping them close together and taking up no more than one-third of the surface area of the seaweed. (They'll start snapping, so work fast.)

♦ Put the packages of clams and mussels on the seaweed, opening side up, and flatten the packages slightly.

♦ Quickly arrange the following foods as space allows: chicken, sausages, corn, and potatoes.

♦ Quickly cover the food with a 1-inch layer of seaweed, being careful to leave a gap around the edge as you did with the first layer.

♦ Cover the grill, leaving the vents open.

♦ Cook the clambake for 25 minutes without opening the lid. Uncover it carefully, tilting the lid away from you to avoid being scalded by steam. With a pair of long tongs, peel back some of the seaweed to uncover one lobster, and test it for doneness: look for a uniform red color and lift the lobster, pulling on one antenna from near the mouth; if the lobster is cooked through, the antenna will detach easily.

♦ If the lobsters are done, check the clams and mussels: their shells will be fully opened when done. Grasp both sides of the cheesecloth openings with the tongs and lift the packages. Cut open the packages with a pair of scissors and empty the mussels and clams into serving bowls.

♦ Check the chicken and sausages with an instant-read thermometer: it should read 160° to 165°F.

A SUMMER FEAST THAT'S EASY ON THE COOK

Part of the pleasure of a clambake is that there's no last-minute fussing with side dishes or accompaniments—everything is cooked and served at once. I like to serve the clambake straight from the grill on large platters and let everyone pick and choose. Remember that this is hands-on dining—arm each guest with extra napkins (thirsty terry-cloth face towels are best), a lobster shell cracker, a shellfish or cocktail fork, melted butter, and plenty of crusty country bread for sopping up the delicious juices. And a few slices of ice-cold watermelon are never a bad idea.

SOURCES

Charcoal and hardwood—

Lazzari Fuel Company, PO Box 34051, San Francisco, CA 94134; 800/242-7265.
People's Woods, 75 Mill St., Cumberland, RI 02864; 800/729-5800 or 401/725-2700.

Seaweed—

The most common type of seaweed used for clambakes is rockweed, a yellowish-brown tangled-looking weed with little pockets of air along its branches that give it buoyancy under water and provide some of the steam for the clambake. Rockweed grows along the shores of the Atlantic and is often used to cover live lobsters during shipping. Order it through seafood markets that carry live lobsters.

Sam Hayward is the chef/co-owner of Fore Street Restaurant in Portland, Maine. ♦



Beer Choices

Pale and golden ales bring out the taste of clams, lobster, and corn

Bring the beach home with this easy, fun clambake, and match its casual mood with light-bodied brews. To keep from competing with the delicate-flavored shellfish, stick with pale or golden-hued lagers and ales. If you can find them, Northeastern microbrews will add a

true taste of New England to your backyard beach party. Acadia Pale Ale from Maine; Harpoon Ale and Golden Lager from Massachusetts Bay Brewing; Gold Stock Ale from Connecticut; and Catamount Gold from Vermont are all worth seeking out. And you won't go wrong

with the award-winning Samuel Adams Boston Lager, which is widely available coast to coast.

Otherwise, drink the best that your own local breweries offer. Here on the West Coast, I've enjoyed brews from San Diego (La Jolla Red Roast Amber) to Seattle (The Pike Pale Ale) with my shell-

fish. Wherever you live, you're sure to find high-quality beers and ales brewed nearby. Just load your cooler with plenty of frosty bottles—or better yet, set up a keg to tap into all evening long. Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about food and wine in the San Francisco Bay area.



Lemongrass Seduces with Citrusy Fragrance

Use this fragrant herb to infuse soup, flavor roast chicken, season fish, and make the best lemonade

BY MAI PHAM

Whenever I chop lemongrass, I always enjoy its gentle, lemony fragrance. Sometimes I'll even chew on a piece, delighting in its citrusy, slightly gingery flavor. So when my husband, Trong, came up with Lemon Grass as the name for our restaurant, I was ecstatic. Not only do I love lemongrass, but the herb's bright flavor exemplifies the fresh, vibrant character of Southeast Asian cuisine.

LEMONY, YES, BUT NOT AS ASSERTIVE

In its tropical home of Southeast Asia, lemongrass grows in bushes, thriving happily wherever the sun is

hot and the water ample. While the leaves of the long, slender plant aren't particularly eye-catching, the stalk, which looks like a large, woody scallion, possesses a complexity of flavors that isn't easy to put into words. Some describe it as citrusy, perhaps a little gingery. Its lemon flavor isn't nearly as overt as lemon juice or zest; it's more delicate, with a slight floral flavor that gives a dish a refreshing, lingering lift.

In Thailand, sliced lemongrass is tossed into a popular salad of minced chicken and mint. Thai curries, often laced with fiery chiles, are perfumed

When chopping lemongrass, take a moment to enjoy its lovely, fresh fragrance.

with soothing lemongrass. In Vietnam, it's often used in marinades, where it not only adds flavor but creates a wonderful crust as well.

BUY FIRM LEMONGRASS WITH A FAT BULB

As Thai cooking becomes more popular here, the herb becomes easier to find. You can now find it in many grocery stores, as well as in Asian markets.

Fresh lemongrass is firm, pale to medium green, with a whitish-pinkish bulb. The stalks are usually trimmed to about 12 to 18 inches, and they're sometimes bundled. Avoid stalks that are dry and yellow—that's a signal that they're old and have lost moisture, flavor, and fragrance.

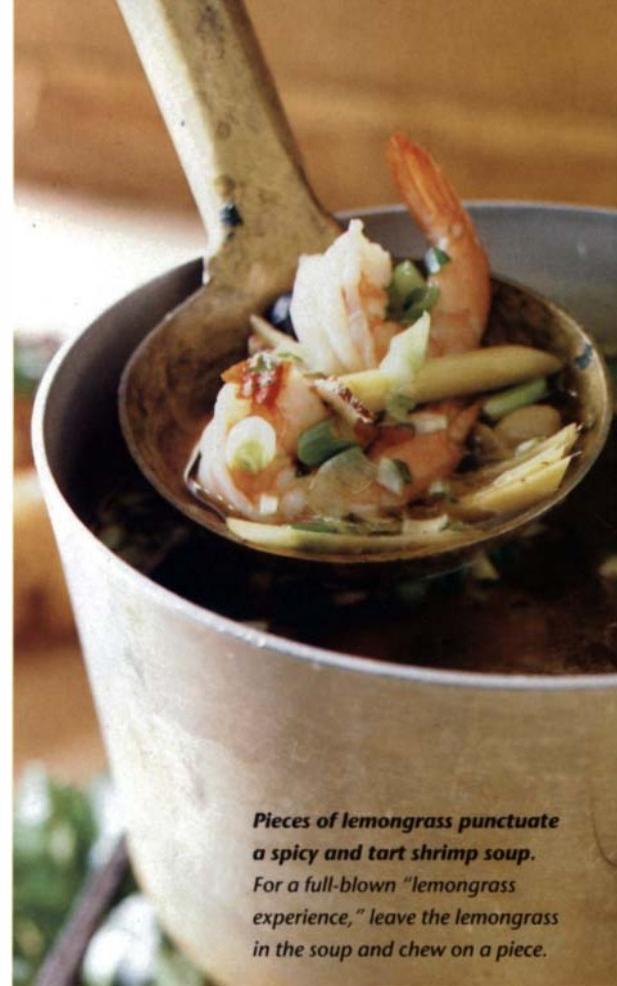
Lemongrass keeps for weeks wrapped in plastic and refrigerated. If you know that you won't be using it within a couple of weeks, store it in a plastic bag in the freezer, where it will keep for months with just a slight loss of flavor. For easier handling, cut it into 1- to 2-inch pieces or chop it before freezing.



Peel away the fibrous outer layer of the lemongrass stalk. Trim the root end.



Bruise the stalk lightly to release its aromatic oils. This is only necessary if you're leaving the stalk in bigger pieces to infuse a soup or a stew.



Pieces of lemongrass punctuate a spicy and tart shrimp soup. For a full-blown "lemongrass experience," leave the lemongrass in the soup and chew on a piece.

Packaged, frozen lemongrass is an acceptable substitute for fresh, but dried or powdered versions have no resemblance to the real thing.

BRUISE THE STALK FOR OPTIMUM FLAVOR

Lemongrass is handled in different ways depending on how it's being used.

To infuse broths, teas, and stews, first bruise the stalk lightly. Crush the stalk with the side of a knife to release the aromatic oils; then cut it into 1- to 2-inch pieces. Add the pieces at the start of cooking so that their fragrance gains intensity as they simmer. Most recipes suggest removing the pieces



Make lemongrass more manageable for mincing. Slice it into very thin rounds before you start to chop. Remove any long fibers that resist chopping before adding the herb to food.



before serving, but I generally leave them in. They're visually interesting, and you might enjoy chewing on some for a more lasting lemongrass effect.

To use in marinades, stir-fries, and salads, finely chop the stalk. This way, the lemongrass can be eaten as part of the dish. Use the bottom whitish part of the stalk, including the bulb; save the more fibrous tops for infusing. To make chopping easier, slice the stalk into very thin rounds first and then finely chop them. If you're chopping a lot of lemongrass, you may want to use a food processor. Either way, remove any long fibers that have resisted the blade.

Lemongrass takes on a different note depending on how it's used and on when it's added to a dish. For a stir-fry with a strong lemongrass flavor, create an aromatic base by lightly browning garlic and minced lemongrass in oil. For a stir-fry with a refreshing lift that doesn't overwhelm other flavors, add the herb at the end of stir-frying. For salads, add finely chopped lemongrass to a dressing if you want a more uniformly flavored dish. Otherwise, add it directly to the salad just before tossing. I prefer the latter because I like the surprise of biting into a piece of lemongrass here and there. To my mind, this kind of random but intense experience is more lively and memorable.

Thai Hot & Sour Shrimp Soup

Galangal, a rhizome similar to ginger, is available fresh or frozen in Asian markets; ginger is an acceptable



substitute. Chile paste, made from ground red chiles, garlic, and vinegar, is sold in Asian markets and some supermarkets. *Yields about 8 cups; serves four.*

**1 Tbs. vegetable oil
1 tsp. finely chopped garlic
1/2 tsp. chile paste
1/2 tsp. dried chile flakes
3 thin slices fresh or frozen galangal (or 2 thin slices fresh, peeled ginger)
1 stalk lemongrass, bruised with the side of a knife and cut into 1-inch pieces on the diagonal
6 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock
2 Tbs. fish sauce
4 1/2 tsp. sugar
2 Kaffir lime leaves, cut in half (optional)
1/2 cup drained canned straw mushrooms (or 3 oz. white mushrooms, quartered)
2 plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped
1/2 lb. raw shrimp, shelled and deveined
1/4 cup fresh lime juice
1 scallion, coarsely chopped
5 basil leaves, chopped
5 cilantro sprigs, chopped**

In a saucepan, heat the oil over moderate heat. Add the garlic, chile paste, and chile flakes. Stir until fragrant, about 1 min. Add the galangal and lemongrass; stir until the ingredients are lightly browned, about 2 min. Add the chicken stock and simmer for about 15 to 20 min.

Bring the soup to a boil. Add the fish sauce, sugar, Kaffir lime leaves, mushrooms, and tomatoes. Add the shrimp

Lemongrass and cilantro give roast chicken a bright, vibrant flavor. In place of gravy, serve a tangy dipping sauce made with ginger and lime.

and cook until they just turn pink, about 2 min. (The shrimp will continue to cook in the hot broth.) Remove the pan from the heat and add the lime juice, scallion, basil, and cilantro. Serve immediately.

Lemongrass Roast Chicken

A last-minute basting of a lemongrass and cilantro paste gives this dish a wonderful aroma. *Serves four.*

*1/2 cup finely chopped lemongrass (3 or 4 stalks)
2 Tbs. finely chopped shallots
1 Tbs. finely chopped garlic
4 1/2 tsp. fish sauce
1 Tbs. soy sauce
1 Tbs. dried chile flakes
1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
2 Tbs. sugar
1 whole chicken (3 to 4 lb.), rinsed and patted dry
2 Tbs. finely chopped cilantro
1 Tbs. vegetable oil*

In a nonreactive dish large enough to hold the chicken, combine all but 2 Tbs. of the lemongrass with all of the shallots, garlic, fish sauce, soy sauce, chile flakes, salt, and sugar. Add the chicken and turn it to coat, tucking some of the marinade underneath its skin. Pour any excess marinade into the bird's cavity. Marinate in the re-

frigerator for at least 3 hours, preferably overnight. Bring the chicken to room temperature before cooking it.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Put the chicken, breast side down, on a rack in a roasting pan. Cook for 40 min. Turn the bird over and roast until the chicken is cooked and nicely browned, 20 to 30 min. The sugar in the marinade may cause the pan juices to burn, but this won't affect the chicken's flavor. About 10 min. before the chicken is done, combine the remaining 2 Tbs. lemongrass with the cilantro and vegetable oil. Using a spoon, rub the mixture on the bird, spreading it evenly; continue roasting. The chicken is done when its juices run clear. Let the chicken sit for 10 min. out of the oven before carving. Serve with ginger-lime dipping sauce (recipe below).

GINGER-LIME DIPPING SAUCE

This tangy sauce is also great with other roasted or grilled meats and with steamed fish. *Yields 2/3 cup.*

*2 cloves garlic
2 Thai bird chiles or other hot fresh chiles, cored and seeded
1 tsp. chile paste
2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh ginger
1/4 cup fish sauce
2 Tbs. fresh lime juice, with pulp
1/4 cup water
4 Tbs. sugar*





A crispy crust made with lemongrass keeps fish moist and flavorful. A green curry sauce counters the spicy coating's heat.

With a mortar and pestle, pound the garlic, chiles, chile paste, and ginger to a paste. Transfer the paste to a small bowl and add the fish sauce, lime juice, water, and sugar. Mix until well blended. Allow the sauce to sit for at least 10 min. before serving to let the flavors develop.

Seared Sea Bass with Spicy Lemongrass Crust

You can substitute another white fish, such as halibut, or even chicken or pork for the sea bass. Serves four:

1/4 cup finely chopped lemongrass (1 to 2 stalks)
1 Tbs. dried chile flakes; more to taste
1 Tbs. finely chopped garlic
1/2 tsp. turmeric
1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
2 tsp. sugar
2 Tbs. water
4 sea bass fillets (6 oz. each)
2 to 3 Tbs. vegetable oil

In a bowl, combine the lemongrass, chile flakes, garlic, turmeric, salt, sugar, and water. Add the sea bass, turning to cover it, and marinate for about 20 min.

In a nonstick frying pan large enough to hold the fish, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the fillets and cook until just done, 5 to 6 min. on each side. Remove from the heat and drain on paper towels. If you like, serve the fish in a pool of green curry sauce (recipe below).

THAI GREEN CURRY SAUCE

Green curry paste is available in Asian markets and in some supermarkets. This sauce is also delicious with grilled foods. Yields about 1 cup.

3/4 cup unsweetened coconut milk
1 1/2 tsp. green curry paste
2/3 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock
1 Tbs. fish sauce
1 Tbs. sugar
1/4 tsp. turmeric
1 Tbs. cornstarch
2 Tbs. water
1/2 tsp. fresh lemon juice

In a small saucepan, heat 3 Tbs. of the coconut milk over low heat. Add the curry paste; stir to dissolve. Let the mixture simmer until fragrant, about 2 min., stirring to prevent burning. Add the chicken stock, remaining coconut milk, fish sauce, sugar, and turmeric. Simmer until slightly reduced, about 10 min. In a separate small bowl, dissolve the cornstarch in the water. Use this to thicken the sauce by adding 1 tsp. at a time and stirring well. Just before serving, stir in the lemon juice. The sauce will keep, covered and refrigerated, for about a week.

Lemongrass Lemonade

This is very popular at my restaurant. Surprisingly, the salt makes the drink's sweetness more pronounced. Yields about 4 cups.

1 cup sugar
2 stalks lemongrass, bruised lightly with the side of a knife and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
3 cups water
1 cup fresh lemon juice (from about 3 large lemons)
1/2 cup fresh lime juice (from about 2 limes)
Pinch salt
2 cups ice
1 lemon, thinly sliced
2 stalks lemongrass, cut into 4 swizzle sticks (optional)

In a small saucepan, combine the sugar, lemongrass pieces, and water, and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Lower the heat and simmer for 20 min. Remove the syrup from the heat; let it sit for about an hour. Strain it into a glass pitcher. Just before serving, add the lemon juice, lime juice, and salt. Stir well and add the ice. Serve in tall glasses with more ice. Garnish with the lemon slices and the lemongrass swizzle sticks.

Mai Pham is chef/owner of Lemon Grass Restaurant and Lemon Grass Cafes in Sacramento, California. She is the author of *The Best of Vietnamese & Thai Cooking* (Prima Publishing, 1996). ♦

Wine Choices

Fragrant and spicy dishes need fruity-floral wines with a bit of sweetness



Highlight lemongrass' bright freshness with fresh flavors in the glass. Fruity, easy-drinking wines will heighten the subtle flavors on your plate.

For any dish with spicy heat, a drink with sweetness gives you the best balance. The hotter the food, in fact, the sweeter the wine should be (up to a point, after which you'd be better off dousing the fire with cold beer instead).

Fruity-floral Rieslings and Gewürztraminers are ideal. Both are made in a wide range of sweetness, so you'll have lots of latitude. German wines range in cost from dirt cheap (usually with

quality to match) to very expensive, but there's an affordable middle ground. Try Kabinett-level Rieslings from Gundersloh and Zilliken. Or try these varietals: from California, Edmeades' Mendocino Gewürztraminer or Bonny Doon's Pacific Rim Riesling; or from the Pacific Northwest, Amity Gewürztraminer of Oregon or Hogue Riesling from Washington. Edmeades and Bonny Doon are bone-dry; Amity and Hogue are off-dry. All are easy on the wallet.

Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about food and wine in the San Francisco Bay area.

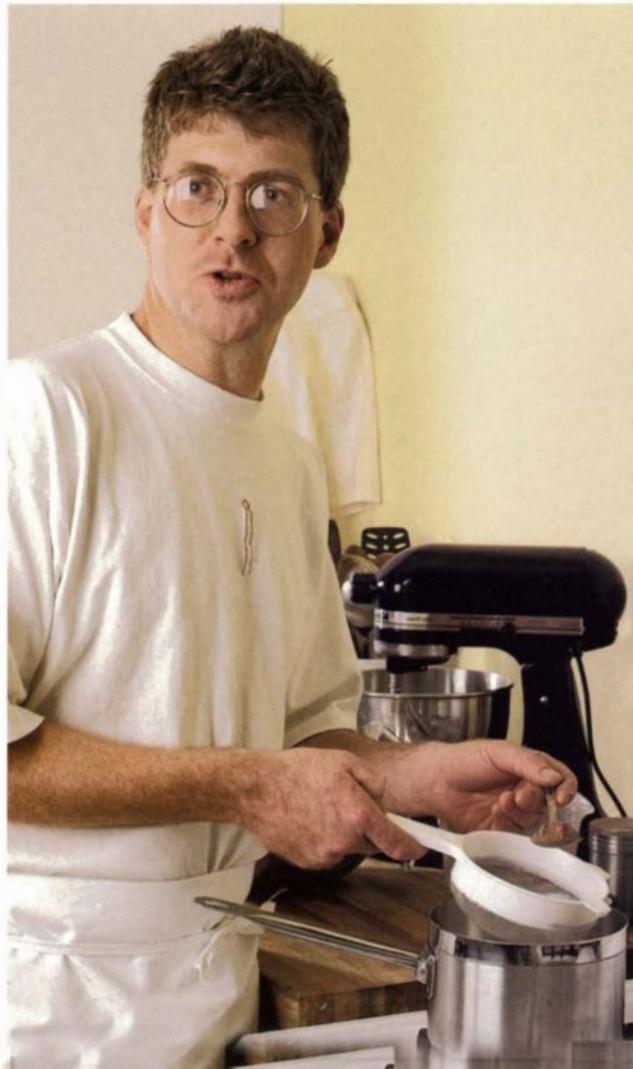
Make a Milk Chocolate and Toasted Marshmallow Ice Cream Sandwich

This scrumptious dessert takes its inspiration from a childhood favorite—campfire s'mores

BY STEPHEN DURFEE

Make the chocolate ice cream

In a heavy-based saucepan, combine the milk and cream. Sift the cocoa powder over the mixture; whisk thoroughly to combine. Sprinkle half the sugar into the saucepan and slowly bring the mixture to a simmer; don't let it boil. Put aside the chopped chocolate in one bowl and fill another with ice water.



Just for a moment, close your eyes and imagine a summer night, sitting around a campfire, telling stories, toasting marshmallows, and eating s'mores. Remember those hot, gooey, graham-cracker and chocolate-bar summer desserts? Okay, you can open your eyes. Did anyone bring napkins?

I confess to a lifelong devotion to s'mores, so as a restaurant pastry chef, I've tried a number of ways to bring this



While waiting for the milk mixture to simmer, whisk the egg yolks with the remaining sugar. Whisk vigorously until the yolks thicken and become a paler shade of yellow, 3 to 4 minutes.



Warm and gooey marshmallow, frosty ice cream.

Finish the sandwiches by running them under the broiler just long enough to brown the marshmallow, while still keeping the ice cream frozen.



To combine the egg and milk mixtures, temper the egg mixture first with a portion of the hot milk. Slowly whisk half the simmering milk into the yolks. Whisk that mixture back into the milk in the saucepan. Reduce the heat to low and stir constantly until the custard is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon (about 170°F).



Pour the cooked custard over the chocolate. Stir until all the chocolate is melted. Set the custard bowl over the bowl of ice water; stir until the custard is completely cool. Pour through a fine strainer and refrigerate for several hours or overnight.



Freeze the ice cream. Pour the custard into an ice-cream machine and start to freeze following the manufacturer's directions. When it's almost completely frozen, line a 9x9-inch pan with plastic wrap (letting excess hang over the sides) and pack the ice cream into it. Level it with a spatula, cover with the plastic wrap, and freeze for several hours or overnight.

Make the graham cracker dough and roll out even, paper-thin crackers



Cream the butter, sugars, and honey in a mixer on medium speed until soft and fluffy. Sift together the flours, salt, baking soda, and cinnamon and pour into the mixing bowl. Mix on slow speed until just combined. Heat the oven to 350°F.



Turn out the mixture onto a clean surface. Press the crumbly-looking dough together with your hands until it just holds together.



Press the dough onto a 12x16-inch piece of parchment. Roughly shape the dough into a rectangle and cover it with another 12x16-inch piece of parchment.

summer-camp confection into the dining room. This year, I'm merging another childhood sweetheart—ice cream sandwiches—with s'mores to make a milk chocolate ice cream dessert with homemade marshmallow and graham crackers, a kind of campfire-meets-baked-Alaska thing. This is an ice cream sandwich that's equally terrific served after a backyard barbecue or in a fine dining room.

START A DAY OR TWO BEFORE SERVING

While this dessert isn't difficult to make, it does require time to make the different components: ice cream, graham crackers, and marshmallow topping. The good news is that you can make the components and assemble most of the sandwich ahead of time. When you're ready to serve, all you have to do is broil the sandwiches. Here's a plan:

Cook the custard for the ice cream two days before you'd like to serve the sandwiches. To develop the flavor, let the custard sit in the refrigerator for several hours or, ideally, overnight, and then freeze it in your machine the next day.

Make the graham crackers a day ahead, while the ice cream freezes. The

crackers will keep in an airtight container for several days if you want to make them before that.

Make the marshmallow topping the day you're serving the sandwiches. You'll need 30 minutes to an hour to firm up the topping in the freezer before cutting portions. You can also make and

This is a campfire-meets-baked-Alaska kind of dessert.

pipe the marshmallow several hours in advance. The sandwiches will taste best on the day they're made, but leftovers will keep in the freezer for a few days. Keep the graham crackers separate so they don't get soggy.

BEG OR BORROW AN ICE-CREAM MAKER

You won't need a lot of fancy equipment to make this dessert; just make sure you have an electric mixer and an ice-cream maker. Any hand-crank or electric ice-cream maker with at least a 1-quart

capacity will do. If you don't have an ice-cream maker, borrow one from a friend.

I do recommend getting hold of an angel food cake cutter (this looks like a large, dangerous comb), which will give your graham crackers a professional look. (I bought mine at Lechter's Housewares for \$2.99.) You'll also need a 12x16-inch baking sheet for the graham crackers. At the restaurant, I use the backside of an aluminum half-sheet pan, but the large air-insulated baking sheets found in kitchen stores (for \$15 to \$20) work well.

FOLLOW THESE TIPS FOR SMOOTH ICE CREAM AND CRISP CRACKERS

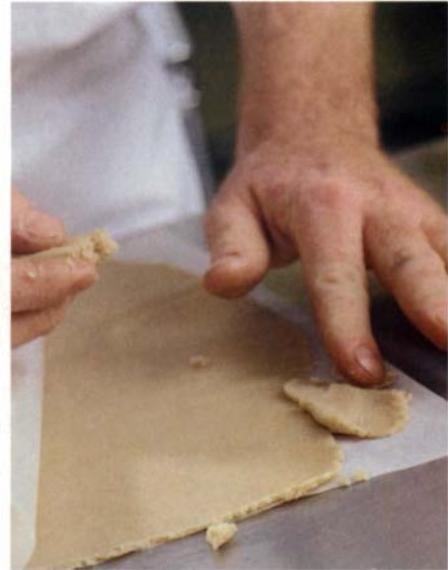
The recipes for the ice cream, graham crackers, and marshmallow topping aren't difficult, but here are a few tips to help you get the best results. The first thing you'll make is the custard for the ice cream.

◆ **Buy the best chocolate for homemade ice cream.** I've also added cocoa powder because I like the bitter edge it lends to the sweet milk chocolate.

◆ **Incorporate the cocoa powder into cold milk and cream.** Cocoa powder dissolves better in cold liquids, and then



Roll the dough out paper thin by rolling from the middle of the paper outward. If the dough is difficult to roll, toss a very small amount of flour between the parchment and the dough on both sides.



You'll need to patch the dough to make it fit the rectangle exactly. Slide the dough and parchment onto a baking sheet. Gently peel away the top layer of parchment.

it has a chance to cook a little with the custard, which mellows its bitterness.

◆ Use a little elbow grease when whisking the egg yolks and sugar for the custard. Take the time (three or four minutes) to really whisk the eggs and sugar vigorously. You'll know it has the right consistency when the eggs thicken, lighten in color, and fall off the whisk in "ribbons."

◆ Combine the milk and egg mixtures by first tempering the eggs with a small amount of hot liquid. Finish cooking the custard over low heat, stirring frequently, and take it off the heat when it's just thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.

◆ Mix the graham-cracker dough just until combined. Someone once asked me how I make such tasty graham crackers: "Do you start with graham-cracker crumbs?" "Yes, and glue," I responded.

Actually, it's much easier than that. The graham-cracker dough is a simple cookie batter. To make a tender cracker with whole-wheat flavor, I use a portion of whole-wheat pastry flour (available in health-food stores), and I add honey, which helps keep the crackers tender and improves their keeping quality. I'm also careful not to overmix the

Partially bake the crackers, trim and mark them, and finish cooking



Bake the dough until the top is golden brown, slightly blistered, and dry-looking, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and, using an angel food cake cutter or a fork, mark rows of holes, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart, all over the dough.



Trim the rough outside edges and cut the dough into 20 squares, about 3 inches each. Use a ruler and work quickly, as the crackers will be difficult to cut evenly if cool. Bake until the cut crackers are a deep golden brown, another 4 to 5 minutes. Cool them and store in an airtight container.

Whip gelatin with egg whites and sugar syrup to make marshmallow “fluff”



Put room-temperature egg whites in the well-cleaned bowl of an electric mixer. Sprinkle the gelatin and a pinch of salt evenly over the whites and whisk by hand to combine. In a small saucepan, mix the sugar, corn syrup, and water. Put a candy thermometer in the pan and turn the heat to medium.



When the sugar mixture comes to a boil, begin whisking the whites on medium speed just until foamy. Don't overbeat. When the sugar mixture reaches 240°F, remove it from the heat. With the mixer running, pour the syrup down the side of the bowl into the frothy egg whites, being careful not to pour it directly onto the spinning whisk. When all the syrup is in the bowl, continue beating until the bowl is cool to the touch, about 15 minutes. Add the vanilla extract and combine.

Pipe the glossy topping onto the ice cream



Transfer the marshmallow mixture to a pastry bag without a tip. Don't overfill it. Remove the ice cream pan from the freezer and uncover it.



Pipe the topping back and forth over the ice cream to make a ½-inch layer. You may not need to use it all. Leave the surface bumpy. Freeze the uncovered pan until the topping is firm, about an hour. If you want to chill it overnight, cover the pan in plastic once the marshmallow is firm.

dough, which I finish pressing together with my hands.

♦ **Roll out the dough very thin.** You'll have to keep picking up pieces of the dough and patching them to fill out the rectangle. If the parchment wrinkles a lot while you're rolling, sprinkle a very small amount of flour between the paper and the dough. But don't go crazy: too much added flour will toughen the crackers.

♦ **Combine gelatin and cooked meringue to make a kind of marshmallow fluff.** I have to be honest and tell you that we're not technically making marshmallow. A proper marshmallow is rather stiff and difficult to eat with a fork; on the other hand, meringue—the fluffy finish on a baked Alaska—lacks any real marshmallow texture at all. As a compromise, you'll make a sort of hybrid, something along the lines of Marshmallow Fluff. I know what you're

thinking, but trust me on this one. You'll need a clean candy thermometer and a very clean mixing bowl and whisk to make the topping. Any oily residue in the bowl or on the whisk could prevent the egg whites from whipping to their full capacity.

FINISH THE SANDWICHES UNDER THE BROILER

When you're ready to serve your ice cream sandwiches, you can brown the tops and warm the marshmallow under a hot broiler. You'll be surprised at how warm and gooey the marshmallow can get without melting the ice cream. Or, if you happen to own a blowtorch—many restaurant pastry chefs use these with abandon—you can brown the topping with that, though the blowtorch browns so quickly that the marshmallow doesn't have time to warm up much.

I like to serve the sandwich on a big plate with a second graham cracker and sometimes a spoonful of chocolate sauce. To really impress your friends and recreate campfire memories right at the dinner table, leave room on the plate for one other thing: a little pile of cinnamon sticks broken into small pieces. Using your blowtorch or a long match, set the cinnamon-stick "logs" on fire. They'll flare up for a minute or two, subside into cozy embers, and give off a little cinnamon-scented smoke, all the while looking convincingly like a miniature campfire.

Assemble the sandwiches and broil until the marshmallow is toasted



Remove the pan from the freezer, peel off the top layers of plastic, and lift out the ice cream block. Invert the pan and put the ice cream block on it. Peel away the plastic from the sides. Put nine of the graham crackers on a baking sheet.



Trim and cut the ice cream block into nine squares. Using a long, thin-bladed knife dipped in warm water, trim the outside edges of the ice cream and cut it into nine 2½-inch squares.



Top each cracker. With a metal spatula, carefully transfer a square of ice cream and marshmallow onto each of the nine crackers.

Ice Cream Sandwich S'mores

For the procedure, follow the photos beginning on p. 60. Be sure to read through all the captions before you start. Yields 9 sandwiches (20 graham crackers; 2 more than needed).

FOR THE ICE CREAM:

1½ cups whole milk
1½ cups heavy cream
1 Tbs. cocoa powder
½ cup sugar
7 oz. good-quality milk chocolate, finely chopped
8 egg yolks (reserve half the whites for the marshmallow topping)

FOR THE GRAHAM CRACKERS:

8 Tbs. soft butter
2 Tbs. brown sugar
2 Tbs. sugar
2 tsp. honey
1 cup flour
¼ cup whole-wheat pastry flour
Pinch salt
¼ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon

FOR THE MARSHMALLOW TOPPING:

4 egg whites at room temperature
¼ oz. (1 package) unflavored powdered gelatin
Pinch salt
¾ cup sugar
¼ cup corn syrup
¼ cup water
1 tsp. vanilla extract



Broil the sandwiches and serve right away. Heat the broiler until very hot, position the top oven rack as close to the heating element as possible, and put the sandwiches under the broiler. Broil (rotating the baking sheet if necessary) until the marshmallow topping is evenly browned. Serve each sandwich with a second graham cracker, a sprinkling of cinnamon, and a dollop of chocolate sauce, if you like.

Stephen Durfee is the pastry chef at The French Laundry in Yountville, California. ♦

Infusing liquids with flavor

Anyone who's ever made a cup of tea has made an infusion—a simple technique for extracting the essence of an ingredient, such as vanilla beans, tea leaves, or cinnamon sticks, to flavor a liquid. I use infusions to flavor *crème anglaise* and all sorts of custards, béchamel and other savory sauces, ice creams and sorbets, even drinks (like the *limoncello* in *Fine Cooking* #19).



Herbs, dried fruit, nuts, and spices can all be used to make infusions. Steeped in a liquid and then strained out, these seasonings leave their flavor, and sometimes their color, behind.



Press on the seasonings in the strainer to get every last bit of flavor. The strained, infused liquid is now ready to be used in your recipe.

beans, tea leaves, or cinnamon sticks, to flavor a liquid. I use infusions to flavor *crème anglaise* and all sorts of custards, béchamel and other savory sauces, ice creams and sorbets, even drinks (like the *limoncello* in *Fine Cooking* #19).

A HOT LIQUID MAKES A MORE FLAVORFUL INFUSION

Combine the liquid, whether it's milk, cream, sugar syrup, or even soup stock, with the flavoring ingredient over moderate heat. When the liquid is just shy of a boil, remove the pan from the heat, cover, and let the mixture steep until the liquid is richly flavored, usually 30 minutes to an hour. Strain out the flavorings and press on them in the strainer to extract all the liquid. Then use the flavored liquid as directed in your recipe.

EXPERIMENT WITH FLAVORS

Beyond what the cookbooks call for, you can personalize your recipes by making infusions with a wide range of ingredients. Try some of these:

- ◆ Steep fresh lavender, rosemary, or sprigs of thyme in sugar syrup to make a palate-cleansing sorbet.

- ◆ Flavor milk with tarragon and roasted garlic to make a savory flan.
- ◆ Use star anise, lemongrass, and dried chiles to lend an Asian accent to soup stock.
- ◆ Make *crème anglaise* from milk infused with fresh mint and orange zest to serve with chocolate desserts.
- ◆ Infuse cream with freshly grated ginger, crushed coffee beans, or toasted pistachios

to make an intensely flavored base for ice cream.

- ◆ Add lemon zest and fennel seeds to sugar syrup to make a refreshing poaching liquid for fresh fruit.

Getting corn off the cob

When fresh corn is in season, I eat it whenever, however I can. Usually that means hot corn, eaten right from the cob with plenty of butter. But sometimes I take the kernels off the cob and use them in salsas, chowders, and breads.

There are two basic ways for taking corn off the cob. The one you use depends on whether you want whole kernels to use in a salad or salsa or cream-style corn to flavor soups, puddings, and breads. However you do it, figure on about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of corn per cob.

A SHARP KNIFE IS THE BEST TOOL

Forget about all the gadgets you've seen for stripping corn. A sharp kitchen knife does the job best.

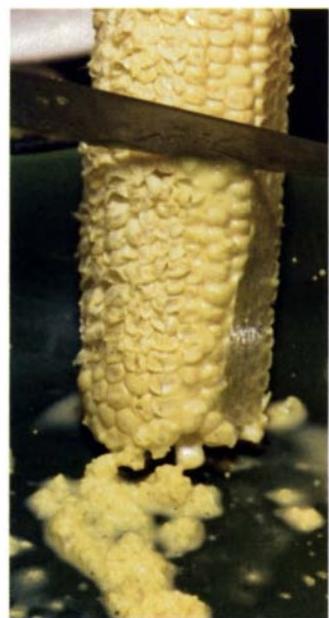


For creamed corn, first score the kernels. Draw the tip of your knife down the center of each row.

Begin by shucking the corn and removing the silk. Cut off the stem end of each ear to give you a sturdy base on which to stand the ear.

For cream-style corn, use the back of a knife. When you want just the juicy pulp from the kernels, without the skins, score the kernels by drawing the tip of your knife down the center of each row. Then scrape the cob with the back of your knife instead of the blade. You'll squeeze out the pulp and juices and leave the skin behind. Just don't push so hard that the skins come off, too. The idea is to leave behind hollow skins like an empty honeycomb.

If you want whole kernels of corn, first blanch the ears. Dip them in boiling water for a minute or two and then cool them under cold running water before you strip them. This "sets" the milk so it doesn't spurt when you scrape the kernels off the cob. Hold



Use the back of your knife to scrape the cob from top to bottom. You'll squeeze out just the milk and pulp, leaving the skins behind.

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Try the delicious salad recipe below, featuring ATHENOS FETA CHEESE and CALIFORNIA WALNUTS.

SPINACH & FETA SALAD WITH TOASTED WALNUTS

Prep time: 25 minutes

6 cups torn spinach
2 oranges, peeled, sliced 1/4-inch thick (1 1/2 cups)
1 pkg. (4 oz.) Crumbled ATHENOS™ Feta Cheese
1/2 cup raspberries
1/2 cup thinly sliced red onion

1/2 cup chopped California walnuts
3 Tbsp. COLAVITA™ Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1/4 cup raspberry or strawberry vinegar
1 1/2 tsp. honey
Dash salt

HEAT oven to 350° F. Place walnuts in pan and bake 8-10 min.
PLACE spinach, oranges, feta cheese, raspberries, onion and walnuts in large bowl; toss lightly.
MIX oil, vinegar, honey and salt. Pour over salad and toss. Makes 6 side-salad servings.

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To remove corn kernels intact, use a sharp chef's knife. Scrape the corn off the cob, a few rows at a time.

the ear, tip end up, on a plate or inside a shallow bowl. Cut down the ear on each cob, removing a few rows at a time. The leftover, still-juicy cobs make delicious stock, or you can scrape them clean and add their fresh-tasting juices to sauces, soups, and dressings.

Shucking clams and oysters

I've noticed that whenever I go to an oyster bar, the guy shucking the shellfish (it's almost always a guy) usually has bulging forearms and biceps that rival Popeye's. I always figured that before I'd be able to open a clam, I'd have to hire a personal trainer. But I've learned that with the right tools, a little technique, and yes, a bit of muscle, even a weakling like me can open shellfish.

THE RIGHT TOOLS MAKE THE JOB EASIER

Before shucking, arm yourself

with a heavy-duty kitchen towel, a pot holder, or a specially designed shucker's glove as protection from any slip of the knife or the rough edges of the shell. Set a small bowl nearby to catch any juices that spill. You'll want to pour these flavor-rich juices back over the shellfish or add them to whatever you're cooking.

Specially designed knives make the work easier. A clam knife has a thin, flat blade. You can also open clams with a regular table knife as long as it's not too pointed. An oyster knife is shorter and sturdier, with a pointed tip for boring into the shell hinge to pop it open. A sharp kitchen knife makes a poor and dangerous substitute for either of these tools. Some shuckers wedge a church-key type of can opener between the shells to pry them apart, but the opener's sharp tip can cause injuries if you're not careful.

PRY SHELLS OPEN WITH A PUSH, A TWIST, AND A LITTLE MUSCLE

Shellfish open most easily when they're cold. Keep clams and oysters refrigerated until you're ready to shuck, and begin by scrubbing the shells clean under cold running water. Discard any that aren't tightly closed.



Secure oysters for easier handling. Hold the oyster, flatter shell up, with a folded towel and place the tip of the knife near the hinge at the pointed end. Pry and push the tip to bore into the shell until it pops open.



Make oysters easier to eat. Run the knife along the inside of the shell and loosen any meat that still clings to it.

Clams are easier to open than oysters. Their shells allow you to slide a knife between them without having to twist or pry your way in (see photo below).

Oysters, on the other hand, can be quite tenacious. They're best opened by boring the tip of the oyster knife between the shells, near the hinge at the pointed end (see photo above.) Twist and push the knife with a fair amount of force until the shell pops open.

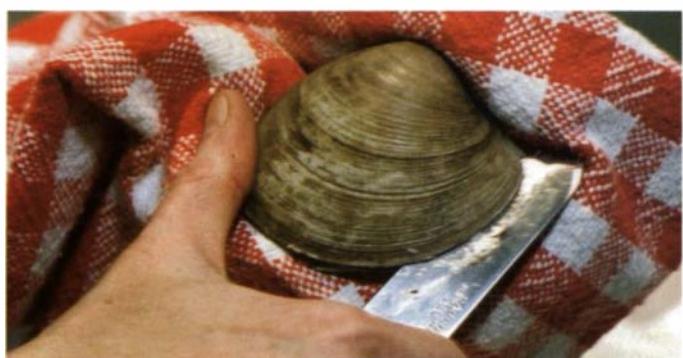
It takes practice to find just the right spot to insert the knife. If the shell crumbles, which often happens, move to another spot along the side of the shell and try again.

Whether you're opening oysters or clams, once you get

the knife between the two shells, keep the blade flush with the underside of the shell. Your goal is to cut the top muscle (clams have two, oysters one) as close to the shell as possible without piercing or damaging the soft meat.

As you free the top shell, carefully pry it loose and finish detaching any meat that clings to it. If the shellfish are headed for a raw bar, hold the bottom shell level so you won't spill the tasty juices. Then slip the knife under the meat nestled in the bottom shell to release it.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦



Hold the clam firmly in the palm of your towel-covered hand. You'll notice that one side of the shell flares out slightly. Insert the knife at that point, force the blade between the shells, and pry them open.



Once you've opened the clam, cut through the muscles that hold the meat to the shell. Take care not to cut through the center of the clam.

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2 - 3 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
Fresh basil leaves, coarsely chopped
2 lbs. fresh ripe tomatoes, diced
1/2 cup of chopped Italian parsley
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 fresh rosemary sprigs, finely chopped
1 lb. fresh fettuccini noodles
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

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How to Cook Tender and Juicy Meat and Fish

Meal that's juicy and tender is a treat, yet a dry, tough steak can be a struggle just to cut. Why are meat, fish, poultry, and eggs sometimes moist and tender and other times tough, dry, or rubbery? Hint: all are high-protein foods.

HOW PROTEINS COOK

In their raw state, proteins are great long molecules curled into spiral, spring-like shapes or tangled wads. Each protein molecule is held together by bonds that stretch across the coils

When heated or exposed to acid or even air, the bonds break and the protein unwinds. Unwound proteins are

said to be "denatured." When one denatured protein meets another, the two bond to form a loose mesh that traps water.

You can see proteins bond. Raw protein molecules are tightly bound separate units, so light travels easily between them. Raw egg whites, fish, shrimp, scallops, and chicken, are translucent. But when they're cooked, the individual proteins join so there's no room for light to go between, making them opaque. (Because red meat contains hemoglobin and other compounds, the change is less obvious in meat.) Ideally, this protein network is juicy and tender, which we experience when we bite into a properly cooked steak or roast chicken.

TOO MUCH HEAT DRIES AND TOUGHENS PROTEINS

Consider two identical steaks,



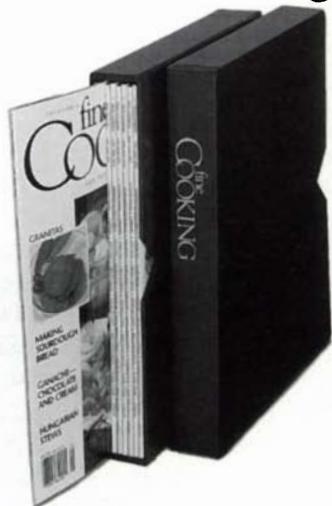
Brief cooking is the secret to a tender, juicy steak. Cooking just long enough for the denatured proteins to form a mesh holds precious juices in the meat.

one medium rare and the other well done. The medium-rare one will be more tender and juicy. That's because as proteins continue to cook, the bonds tighten and the protein molecules draw closer together, squeezing out the water that was trapped between them. That once juicy, tender network of protein molecules becomes tough and dry.

Steak, like other muscles, is composed of long protein fibers that are wrapped

together in bundles, somewhat like telephone wires bound inside a thicker cable. When the steak is gently heated to 120°F, a point at which it's still rare, these bundles of protein shrink only in diameter, not in length, and little water is lost. But as the internal temperature of the meat increases, the fibers begin to shrink lengthwise, too, and major water loss begins. The steak becomes drier and tougher. As its internal temperature rises, the steak

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Reader Service No.	ADVERTISER	Page No.	Reader Service No.	ADVERTISER	Page No.	Reader Service No.	ADVERTISER	Page No.	Reader Service No.	ADVERTISER	Page No.
	Aga Cookers	82		De Loach Vineyards	13	14	Jenn-Air	2, 3	57	Rafal Spice Co.	83
70	Alessi Oils and Vinegars	21	15	Diamond Mach	13		Jesse Jones	79	12	Reynolds Wrap	15
54	Antique Mall & Crown Rest.	23	30	Drannan's Innovative Culinary Instruments	81	56	John Boos & Co.	83	41	Rhode School of Cuisine	84
1	Armeno Coffee Roasters	83	34	EarthStone Wood-Fire Ovens	83	72	Kalamata Olives/LMI	81	3	Royalty Seafood	82
53	B & L Specialty Foods	81	43	Eden Foods	77	5	Kelly and Sons	83	37	San Francisco Herb Co.	81
67	Ball Home Canning Products	11	33	Edward Hamilton Book Sellers	83		Kitchen Garden Books	73		Scottsdale Culinary Institute	79
73	Bar-B-Que Specialties	81	20	Embellishments	83	36	Kitchen Krafts	84	49	Shaw Guides	81
18	Bar-B-Que Woods	75	27	Five Star Ranges	23	71	KitchenAid Mixer	25	48	Sensation Chocolate Maker	75
44	BelGioioso Cheese, Inc.	79	65	Food Heritage Press	81	6	KitchenAid Food Processor	24	4	Smith Cutlery Inc.	82
23	Bertolli Olive Oil	7	45	Fortant De France	87	2	Lifetime Career Schools	82	55	Sullivan College	19
9	Brother Kitchen Assistant	69	35	Fortuna's Sausage Co.	83		New England Cheesemaking Supply Co.	82	64	Teitel Brothers	82
25	Butch Long's Steaks	79	66	French Culinary Institute	77	42	Peco Culinary Clothing	19	52	The British Shoppe	82
69	Calphalon	71	22	G & R Publishing Co.	81	24	Pepper Mill Imports	82	26	The Chef's Collection	81
47	Cambridge School of Culinary Arts	73	40	Game Sales International Inc.	13	46	Perotti's Specialty Foods	81	38	Upton Tea Imports	81
50	Chef's Catalog	19	68	Global Products		63	Polder Inc.	84	51	VacMaster	83
39	Chesapeake Bay Gourmet	83	67	Center/Brother	83		Professional Cutlery Direct	81	21	Waterstone/Cooke's Edge	83
8	Colavita Olive Oil	67	10	Honorable Jane Company	82	19	Professional Cutlery Direct	82		Western Culinary Institute	73
58	Cookbooks by Morris Press	82	32	Indian Harvest	81		Professional Home Kitchens	81	11	Windsor Vineyard	23
	Cucina Mia	82							29	Wine Stuff	82
									60	Wolf Ranges	75

FOOD SCIENCE

shrinks significantly and decreases in weight.

GENTLE HEAT IS KEY TO JUICY, TENDER TEXTURE

When cooking proteins, the goal is to carefully raise the internal temperature of the food enough to cook it without toughening it. This way, as the proteins are denatured and form their juicy mesh, the bonds tighten a little, but not so much that all the trapped water is squeezed out.

Tender meat can be quickly grilled or broiled over high heat, since the internal temperature of the meat is still kept low by the brief cooking time. Tougher cuts like pot roast must be cooked to a higher internal temperature to melt the unchewable connective tissue. The meat fibers shrink and dry as you'd expect,

but the traditional method of cooking a pot roast—a slow, moist braise—produces excellent juices for a sauce or gravy, which alleviates its dryness.

ACID AND AIR ALSO DENATURE PROTEINS

Heat isn't the only thing that can cause a protein molecule

to unwind. If you've ever marinated seafood in an acidic marinade, you've seen raw scallops or shrimp turn from translucent to opaque white. The Latin American specialty seviche relies on this principle, allowing acidic lime juice to "cook" thin slices of seafood. But just as too much

heat dries and toughens proteins, too much time spent in a strongly acidic marinade makes delicate food chewy and tough.

Exposure to air can also tighten protein bonds. Beaten egg whites for a soufflé or a meringue dry out and lose their elasticity if they're exposed to air before being combined with other ingredients. The longer the whipped whites sit, the firmer the bonds become. When the egg foam is heated, these firm-set bubbles can't expand, and the soufflé won't rise well. Fortunately, beating sugar into the whites prevents them from drying.



The muscle fibers in flank steak run lengthwise, allowing you to see how they shrink when overcooked. The strips all started out the same length. The strip cooked to 120°F is almost the same length as the raw piece, while those cooked to higher temperatures get progressively shorter, tougher, and drier.

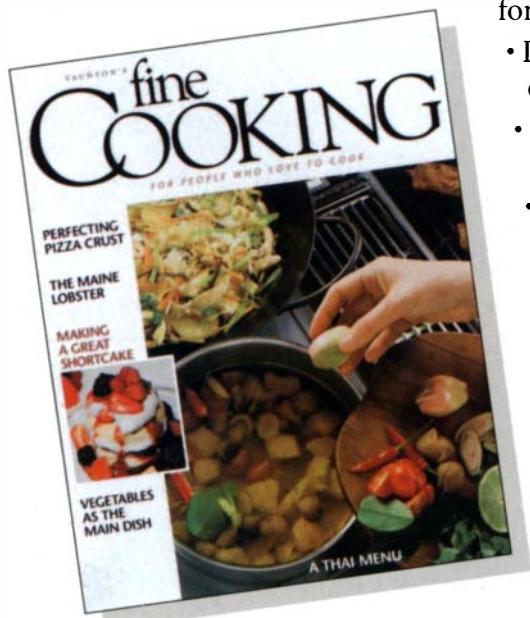
Shirley O. Corriher, author of *CookWise* (Morrow, 1997), teaches food science across the country. She's a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

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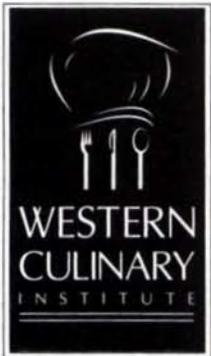
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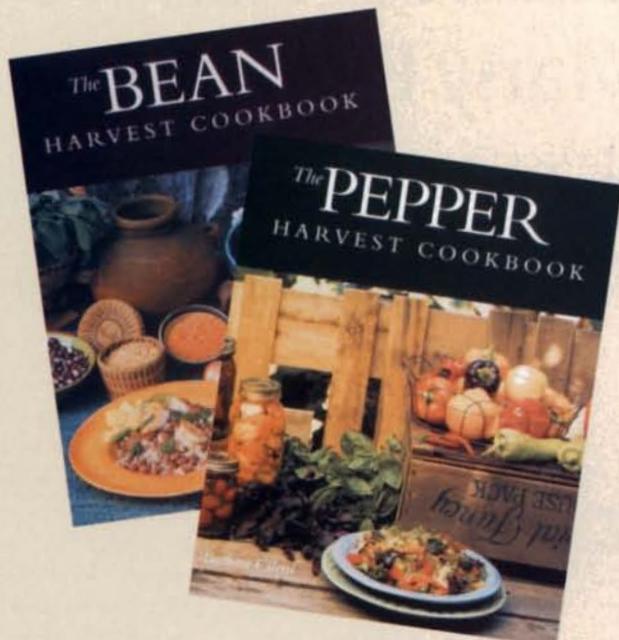
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Discover Honey's Many Flavors

Until honey became a passion of mine, I never really gave it much thought. Sure, I loved its sweet taste, its golden color, and its luscious texture, but then I discovered a few things about honey that took me by surprise. I had no idea just how hard honeybees work to make it. I'd watch them flying from flower to flower, their monotonous buzz as sure a sign of summer as the heat. And though they certainly seemed driven, I didn't know that they have to tap two million blossoms to make just one pound of honey. Nor did I realize just how many kinds of honey there are.

THE FLOWER DETERMINES FLAVOR

You may think that honey is honey is honey. But the kind of blossom from which the bees get nectar determines a honey's flavor as well as its color.

Some commercial blends combine a variety of honeys for consistent flavor and color. Other honeys, often called wildflower honeys, aren't blended but are made from the nectar of several different or

unidentified flowers. But the most pronounced flavors come about when beekeepers position their bees to take nectar from just one variety of blossom.

The colors of "single-flower" honeys range from practically clear acacia honey to almost black buckwheat. Generally, the darker the honey, the stronger the flavor.

Sweet, slightly floral tasting honeys, like those made from

More than 300 kinds of honey are made in the United States alone, each with a distinctively different flavor.

clover, alfalfa, and tupelo tree nectar, add a delicate sweetness to desserts and fruit dishes and are good all-purpose honeys. More savory honeys, such as those collected from herbs like rosemary and thyme, can add an aromatic flavor to meat, poultry, and vegetables. Avocado honey is a dark amber with a rich buttery taste, while Alaskan fireweed is water-white with a lovely smoky flavor. Orange-blossom honey has a slight citrus flavor that's wonderful in custards and sweets.

The color of honey gives a clue to its flavor. Standing from left, buckwheat, blueberry, eucalyptus, and fireweed; in front, avocado honey.



A luscious, sweet liquid. Honey straight from the jar is delicious on cornbread, toast, and scones.

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You'll most often find honey sold in jars in liquid form. Creamed or spun honey is made by finely crystallizing the honey until it's thick and creamy; it's wonderful spread on toast. Comb honey is

recipes that call for it, you can try using it in baking recipes that call for granulated sugar with a few adjustments.

- ◆ Use 1 part honey for every 1 1/4 parts sugar.
- ◆ Reduce the liquid in the recipe by 1/4 cup.
- ◆ Add 1/2 teaspoon baking soda for each cup of honey to counter its acidity and weight.
- ◆ Turn the oven down by 25 degrees to prevent over-browning.

Jane Charlton, author of *A Taste of Honey* (Chartwell Books, 1995), is partial to leatherwood honey from her native Australia. ♦

EXPERIMENT WITH HONEY

- ◆ Glaze roasted meats with a mixture of honey and herbs, like honey and thyme for lamb.
- ◆ Spread slices of sweet potato with a little honey and then roast until golden.
- ◆ Blend a little honey with oil, vinegar, and mustard for a salad vinaigrette that's slightly sweet and full-bodied.
- ◆ Mix honey with soy sauce, orange juice, ginger, and rice wine for a sweet-and-sour marinade for chicken or shrimp.
- ◆ Cream 2 tablespoons honey with 1/2 cup butter and a pinch of cinnamon or nutmeg to make honey butter.



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Sweet and Savory Cooking with Fruit

You don't have to look any further than the fruit on my breakfast table to tell what season it is. In winter we have our toast and tea with grapefruit, oranges, or kiwi; in spring, with apricots, strawberries, or cherries. Summer brings peaches and melons to the table; and in fall we start the day with new-crop apples, pears, and persimmons. This seasonal parade of fruit practically falls into my lap, with the San Francisco Bay area's farmers' markets at my back door.

But when asked to review cookbooks about fruit, I realized how narrow my habits were. Why don't I ever buy carambolas or cherimoyas, prickly pears or breadfruit, gooseberries or guava? Why do I only eat fruit for breakfast or dessert, never thinking to use it in savory dishes?

The books I reviewed introduce cooks like me to untried—and sometimes unheard of—varieties of fruit and tempt us to use them in original ways. While I'm not sure I'm ready to combine salmon and strawberries, as one recipe proposes, and sometimes nothing is better than a perfectly ripe piece of unadorned fruit, I'm now excited about trying new fruits and learning to cook with them, as well as with familiar fruits, in savory and sweet recipes.

Sharon Kramis' *Berries: A Country Garden Cookbook* finds room for fruit throughout the meal. Not that Kramis, a Seattle culinary consultant,



Berries, as well as Apples, Pears, and Summer Fruit, are some of the fresh, accessible cookbooks in Collins' Country Garden series.

I can now add litchis and loquats, cherimoyas and carambolas to the berries and bananas on my breakfast table.

would suggest an all-berry menu, but her beautiful book might inspire one. You could launch your dinner with Mel's Black Currant Cooler, a blend of *crème de cassis* and ginger ale. Then move on to Strawberry Spinach Salad with Toasted Almonds; Broiled Halibut with Greek Lemon Sauce, Huckleberries & Chives; and a finale of Bumbleberry Pie (an old name for a mixed-berry pie.)

Compelling photographs by Kathryn Kleinman made me envy cooks in the Pacific

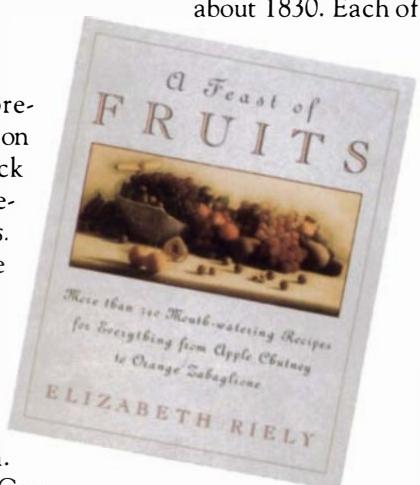
Northwest who can, presumably, get their hands on the huckleberries, black raspberries, and gooseberries pictured in *Berries*.

Kramis' dishes have that unfussy quality that characterizes the best summer cooking, though I experienced a few rough moments making some of them. Seared Pork Loin with Caramelized Onions & Blackberries was straightforward and likeable, but her Prize-winning Orange Scones with

Berries & Cream presented some problems. I flattened the dough, as instructed, into an 8x4-inch rectangle, but I couldn't get that small surface to accept all the topping. Nor could I roll the thick rectangle like a jelly roll, as directed, without first flattening it further.

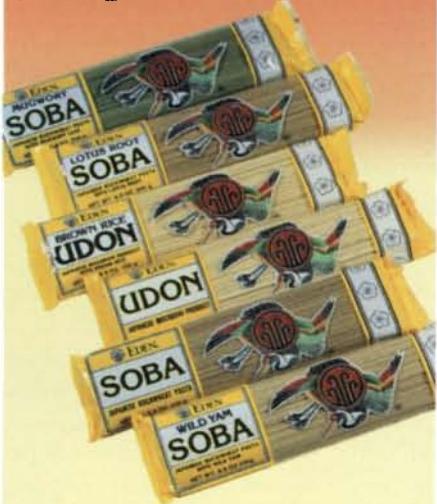
Berries is part of Collins Publishers' series of "Country Garden Cookbooks." While I haven't cooked from the other Country Garden fruit books—*Apples, Pears, Lemons*, and *Summer Fruit*—they all feature the alluring photographs, informative glossaries, and wide range of recipes that make this series fresh and accessible.

A Feast of Fruits, by Massachusetts writer Elizabeth Riely, offers less for the eye than the Country Garden books, but many more recipes and considerable background on nearly three dozen fruits. I didn't know, for example, that the grapefruit has a short history in this country; it wasn't introduced to Florida until about 1830. Each of



A Feast of Fruits is packed with recipes, both classic and innovative, and with cultural information on more than three dozen fruits.

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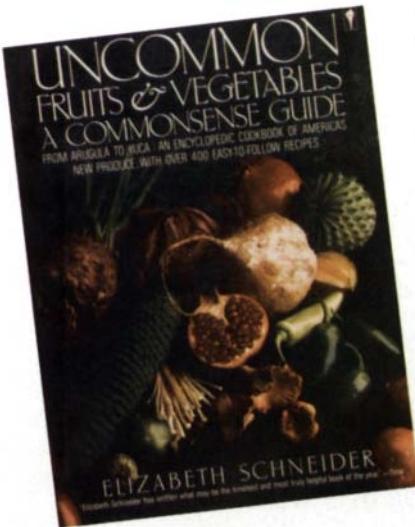
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REVIEWS

Riely's fruit chapters opens with a meaty essay that might touch on history, cultivation, and nutritional qualities and conclude with guidance on selection and storage.

Her recipes, both sweet and savory, never venture into the outlandish or overwrought. I liked her zesty



Elizabeth Schneider's doggedly researched book is an indispensable source for cooking with exotic fruits and vegetables.

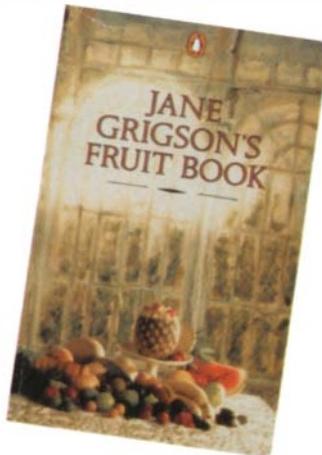
Peach Salsa, an appealing match for grilled pork, and would happily end an alfresco meal with Poached Nectarine Cups Filled with Red Wine Sherbet. A Fig Tapenade made with dried figs struck my palate as odd and harsh, perhaps the result of a fair amount of raw alcohol. But for the most part, her inventions make sense, and her book is now littered with yellow Post-Its marking recipes I'd like to try.

There are detailed recipes galore in Elizabeth Schneider's *Uncommon Fruits & Vegetables: A Commonsense Guide*, but that's not why I treasure this volume. Schneider, one of this country's most prolific food writers, is a dogged researcher committed to getting the facts right.

Although this encyclopedic work has more to say about vegetables than fruits, the fruit information is invaluable—a concise cook's guide to items like cactus pear, carambola, loquat, and litchi that are increasingly part of America's table. Schneider has a knack for describing elusive tastes and textures in evocative ways: a cherimoya's flesh, for example, is smooth yet slightly granular, "like a custard of fine pears." Even more useful are her detailed directions for recognizing quality: following her guidelines, readers can shun the unripe and go straight to the best.

An ethnically varied collection of recipes, many from Schneider's food-world friends, enriches her text. But for me, the book's lasting contribution is the light it sheds on so many mysterious edibles.

For the sheer pleasure of reading it, I would want to have *Jane Grigson's Fruit Book*, a 15-year-old work from the now-deceased English writer. And what a writer she was: engaging, learned, and opinionated, with a tone as direct and conversational as if



In this timeless book, Jane Grigson's opinionated palate and engaging prose reveal her passion for all fruits, from the humble bilberry to the sweet tangelo.

she were writing to a friend. Never one to mince words, she calls rhubarb "governess food" and carambola "an amusing fruit" that looks like "a small banana gone mad." She advises on choosing red currants over black because "they do not look like bed bugs, and haven't that strange scent." With her rich trove of anecdotes, she must have been a lively dinner companion. I wish I'd known her, or at least had the pleasure of sitting next to her at a long dinner party.

In this book, she turns her attention to nearly 50 fruits, a few of which (the bilberry, the cornel, the sorb apple)

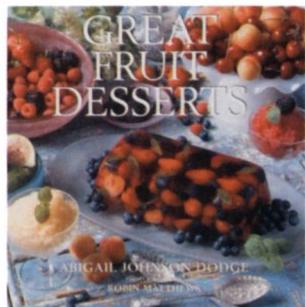
were new to me. Her charming essays about these fruits draw on literature, poetry, painting, history, and her own vast experience to enlighten and entertain us. On one occasion, she recalls a trip to a Greek market where she found quinces that "were the size and shape of the marble breasts of Michelangelo's sleeping Night." Read her diatribe against today's tasteless peaches for a sense of her passionate views.

Beginning cooks may find Grigson's book a challenge to cook from as she is often breezy about quantities and directions. But many of her dishes could not be simpler or more inviting, such as Peaches on Buttered Toast, a homespun dessert of sugared peach slices baked on toasted brioche. And for lunch one day, I thoroughly enjoyed Locket's Savoury: toast, watercress, Comice pears, and Stilton baked until the cheese melts.

Janet Fletcher is a staff food writer for the San Francisco Chronicle and the author of Fresh from the Farmers' Market (Chronicle, 1997). ♦

PUBLISHING INFORMATION

Berries: A Country Garden Cookbook, by Sharon Kramis. Collins Publishers, 1994. \$19.95, hardcover; 95 pp. ISBN 0-00-255344-9.



A Feast of Fruits, by Elizabeth Riely. Macmillan, 1993. \$25, hardcover; 340 pp. ISBN 0-02-601961-2.

Uncommon Fruits & Vegetables: A Commonsense Guide, by Elizabeth Schneider. Harper & Row, 1989. \$20, softcover; 546 pp. ISBN 0-06-091669-9.
Jane Grigson's Fruit Book, by Jane Grigson. Penguin UK, 1982. \$34.95, softcover; 508 pp. ISBN 0-14-046795-5.

ALSO RECOMMENDED

We'd like to brag about another fruit book, this one by pastry chef and *Fine Cooking* recipe tester Abigail Johnson Dodge. *Great Fruit Desserts*, just published by Rizzoli, contains one hundred recipes, ranging from comforting classics (Mile-High Lemon Meringue Pie, Peach Cobbler, Indian Pudding) to light and elegant offerings (Apple Cider Granita, Chilled Lime Sabayon, Coconut Crème Caramel). Dodge's easy-to-follow recipes are augmented by a helpful pantry section, advice on choosing fruit, and 40 beautiful photographs.

(*Great Fruit Desserts*, by Abigail Johnson Dodge. Rizzoli International, 1997. \$15.95, hardcover; 64 pp. ISBN 0-8478-2018-1.)



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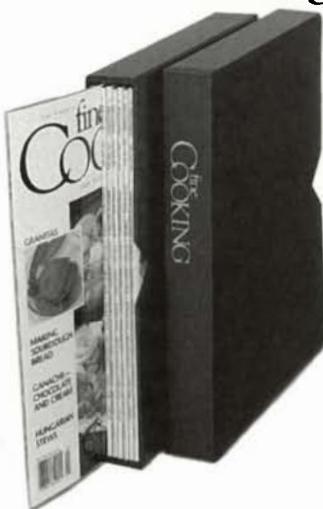
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CALENDAR



MICHIGAN

Peach Festival—

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COLORADO

Watermelon Day—Rocky Ford. This festival began in 1878 when a watermelon farmer named Swink decided to share his harvest at the Rocky Ford train depot. About 25 people came in a train car, and Swink gave them slices of watermelon and whole melons. Each year, more people came to Swink's melon giveaway, prompting him to hand out plums, grapes, and apples. Today, everyone still gets a free watermelon: about 50,000 pounds are eaten. Rocky Ford melons are small, round, and very sweet. There are also watermelon jellies, jams, pickles, and breads for sale, plus a barbecue. August 23. Call 719/254-7483.

CONNECTICUT

Clinton Bluefish Festival—Town Docks at Clinton. Amateur fishermen tell stories of how ferocious the bluefish can be, with its big mouth full of razor-sharp teeth. Hogwash, say commercial fishermen, who only admit to the occasional bite. Everyone, however, agrees on how delicious the rich, meaty bluefish is, and for three days, grilled bluefish fillets are enjoyed by attendees. An assortment of other seafood is also served. August 14–16. Call 860/669-3889.

6th Annual Hot Foods/Cool Wines—McLaughlin Vineyard, Sandy Hook. Outdoor grilling dinner party featuring regional wines and microbrews plus grilled food by well-known regional chefs. Silent auction for scholarship funds. Sponsored by the Connecticut Chapter of the American Institute of Wine & Food. September 7. Call 203/967-6238.

IDAHO

Idaho Spud Day—Shelley City Park, Shelley. Idaho growers produce one-quarter of the nation's potatoes. At this festival they honor the spud by giving away 5,000 baked potatoes, by wrestling in giant mounds of mashed potatoes, and by competing in a team potato-peeling contest (the record: 1,064 pounds in 45 minutes). There are also potato picking and potato cooking contests. September 20. Call 208/357-7661.

INDIANA

Popcorn Festival—Downtown Valparaiso. This is Orville Redenbacher's birthplace, and the area where he hybridized his trademarked large, fluffy popcorn with few "spinsters" or duds. Though Redenbacher sold his patent, he attended the festival each year until his death in 1995. Indiana is the world's top popcorn producer, and Orville Redenbacher's Gourmet Popcorn is still made in Valparaiso with Indiana-grown corn. September 6. Call 219/464-8332.

LOUISIANA

Rayne Frog Festival—Gossen Memorial Park, Rayne. In the 1880s, three brothers recognized the culinary potential of local bullfrogs and shipped them to restaurants across the country. The people of Rayne were so proud that they decorated the whole town with gigantic murals and statues of frogs. Although the frogs' legs served at the festival are now imported, about 350 pounds of them are served, along with crawfish étouffée, crawfish with rice and corn, jambalaya, boudin, and po'boys. August 29–31. Call 318/334-2332.

MAINE

State of Maine Wild Blueberry Festival—Union Fairgrounds, Union. Wild blueberries are smaller, sweeter, and more flavorful than those tame cultivated blueberries. Festival day starts with a wild-blueberry-pancake breakfast, followed by a giveaway of 3,500 small blueberry pies, a pie-eating contest, and the crowning of the Wild Blueberry Queen. The main blueberry day is August 22 of Union Fair Week, but other events are scattered throughout the week. Call 207/785-4173.

NEVADA

Genoa Candy Dance—Town Hall, Genoa. The women of tiny Genoa (population 200) make 3,000 pounds of candy for the annual dance, which started in 1919 to raise money for Genoa's streetlights. There's a huge buffet on the night of the dance, but the homemade candies are the stars: plain and nut fudge, turtles, brittles, dipped chocolates, divinity, and mints to name just a few. September 27–28. Call Annmarie Evans at 702/782-8696.

NEW YORK

Phelps Sauerkraut Festival—Firemen's Field, Phelps. At this festival, a sauerkraut cake weighing more than 100 pounds is sliced and served to the crowd by the Sauerkraut Prince and Princess. July 31 through August 3. Call Bob Bowdren at 315/462-3376.

OKLAHOMA

Okrafest—Checotah. Though not everyone loves okra's slippery quality, the vegetable has many devotees, who flock here to eat fried okra, gumbo, okradogs (pickled okra deep-fried in a spicy batter and mounted on a stick), okra salad (fried okra with bacon, onions, tomatoes, and bell peppers), okra casserole, and okra ice cream. The okra cook-off also brings many creative dishes. September 13. Call 918/473-2070.

OREGON

Charleston Seafood Festival—Charleston Marina. This village on the

Oregon coast is blessed with a plentiful supply of halibut, salmon, snapper, tuna, oysters, clams, and crabs. The festival pays homage to the local seafood and the fishing industry, with local groups preparing fish in myriad ways. August 16–17. Call 800/824-8486.

TEXAS

World Championship Barbecue Goat Cook-Off—Richards Park, Brady. On cook-off day, 125 teams assemble to grill half a goat according to each group's secret recipe. After the judging, the crowd can sample the entries or sit down to a lunch of barbecued goat, pinto beans, potato salad, and bread. August 30. Call 915/597-3491.

VIRGINIA

Clyde's Farm Dinner & Festival—Clyde's of Reston. Joanne Weir, award-winning cooking teacher and cookbook author and former Chez Panisse chef, joins chefs from all Clyde's restaurants to celebrate the summer harvest with a bountiful buffet of dishes featuring fruits and vegetables grown especially for Clyde's by farmers in Virginia and Pennsylvania. Meet the farmers and chefs who make it happen. July 29–30. Call Beverly Brockus at 202/333-9180.

TV Food Network's Creative Cooking Expo—The Fashion Centre at Pentagon City, Arlington. Culinary exhibits and cooking and food demonstrations by famous chefs and TV Food Network celebrities. The International Taste Fest showcases the area's foremost restaurants. September 26–27. Call 703/415-2130.

WISCONSIN

Sweet Corn Festival—Angell Park, Sun Prairie. In the early 1950s, some Lions Club members who worked at a corn-canning factory brought some fresh corn from the factory to a Lions picnic. That small picnic has grown into the state's biggest corn festival, with 100,000 visitors eating 70 tons of corn served with half a ton of butter and three cases of salt. August 14–17. Call 608/837-4547.

Send event announcements to Calendar, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or via e-mail (fc@taunton.com). Include dates, a complete address, and the phone number for more information. Listings are free but restricted to events of direct interest to cooks. The deadline for entries in the December/January issue is September 1.

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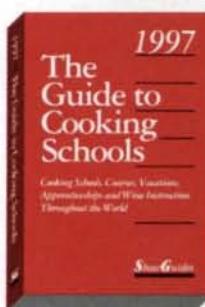
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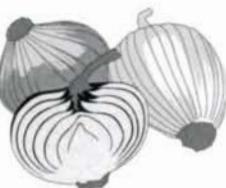
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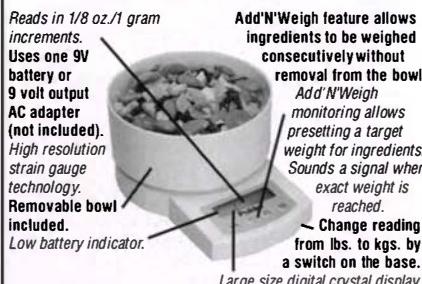
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RECIPES**COVER RECIPE**

Gazpacho with Sourdough Croutons 38

BEVERAGES

Lemongrass Lemonade 59

DESSERTS, CAKES**& PASTRY**

Angel Food Cake 45

Ice Cream Sandwich
S'mores 65**MAIN DISHES****Fish/Shellfish**Kettle-Grill Clambake 52
Seared Sea Bass with Spicy Lemongrass Crust 59**Meat**

Korean-Style Marinated Skirt Steak 35

Skirt Steak with Rosemary, Black Pepper & Balsamic Vinegar 35

Tex-Mex Skirt Steak 34

Poultry

Lemongrass Roast Chicken 58

Pasta

Basic Orecchiette Pasta 48

Orecchiette with Broccoli Raab & Anchovies 49

Orecchiette with Mussels & Mint 49

Orecchiette with Tomatoes, Basil & Ricotta Salata 48

SALADSGrilled Asparagus & Portabella Mushroom Salad 30
Grilled Endive Salad 31
Grilled Salade Niçoise 29**SAUCES, CONDIMENTS & SEASONINGS**

Ginger-Lime Dipping Sauce 58

Salsas:

Avocado, Cucumber & Red Pepper Salsa 41
Grilled Corn & Tomato Salsa 41
Mango, Jicama & Black Bean Salsa 41
Thai Green Curry Sauce 59**SOUPS, STEWS & STOCKS**Thai Hot & Sour Shrimp Soup 57
Tomato Soups:
Creamy Tomato-Basil Soup 39
Spicy Tomato Broth with Couscous & Chicken 38
Yellow Gazpacho with Sourdough Croutons 38**TECHNIQUES**Balancing flavors & textures in salsas 40–41
Building a fire for a clambake 52–53
Cooking & shelling lobster 16–17
Cooking high-protein foods 70
Draining deep-fried foods 24;
pasta 25

Folding ingredients 44

Grilling salmon 22; vegetables for salads 27–29

Infusing liquids 66

Layering food for a clambake 54

Marinating meat 9

Microwaving vegetables 22

Peeling garlic 25

Pitting olives 25

Separating eggs 44

Shucking clams & oysters 67

Tempering egg yolks 61, 63

Whipping egg whites 44

INGREDIENTS

Cake flour 44

Chinese hot sauce 14

Clams, about 51; shucking 67

Confectioners' sugar 44

Corn, getting off the cob 66

Eggs, separating 44

Egg whites, bringing room temperature 22; whipping 44

Endive, grilling 30

Flour, storing 9

Garlic, peeling 25

Honey, about 74; softening 22

Lemongrass, about 55–56; bruising 56–57; choosing 56; chopping 56; using in marinades 57

Lobsters, about 51, cooking & shell-ing 16–17; removing bands 52

Meat, marinating 9

Oysters, shucking 67

Olives, pitting 25

Pasta, draining 25

Plums, about 10, 12

Polenta, making in rice cooker 22

Potatoes, keeping white 25

Salmon, grilling 22

Semolina 46

Skirt steak, choosing 33; cooking 34; marinating 34; pounding 33–34

Pasta dough, eggless, cooking 47; kneading 47; mixing 46–47; shaping 47

Tomatoes, choosing 36; peeling & seeding 38

Vegetables, grilling for salads 27–29

Zest, removing from grater 22

TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

Copper pots 8

Crystal decanters 8

Hardwood charcoal 53, 54

Heat-resistant spatulas 14

Kitchen flooring, choosing 18–21

Miniature blowtorch 14

SOURCES

Semolina flour 47

Charcoal & hardwood 54

Seaweed 54

Spiral slicer 6

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Grilled Salade Niçoise	29	710	430	41	30	48	8	33	5	270	1640	5	
Grilled Asparagus & Portabella Salad	30	500	410	9	22	45	4	28	11	0	420	7	
Grilled Endive Salad	31	140	100	7	7	11	3	6	1	10	350	1	
Tex-Mex Skirt Steak	34	250	130	24	4	15	4	7	2	60	740	1	
Skirt Steak w/Rosemary & Balsamic	35	250	100	25	10	12	4	5	1	60	500	0	
Korean-Style Marinated Skirt Steak	35	270	120	25	11	14	4	6	2	60	1120	1	
Gazpacho with Sourdough Croutons	38	190	80	4	25	9	2	6	1	5	260	4	per cup
Spicy Tomato Broth, Couscous, Chicken	38	200	60	25	10	6	1	2	1	95	240	2	per cup
Creamy Tomato-Basil Soup	39	180	120	4	13	14	7	5	1	40	190	3	per cup
Grilled Corn & Tomato Salsa	41	45	25	1	6	2.5	0.5	1.5	0.5	0	125	1	per 1/4 cup
Mango, Jicama & Black Bean Salsa	41	40	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	110	2	per 1/4 cup
Avocado, Cucumber & Pepper Salsa	41	40	25	1	4	3	0.5	2	0.5	0	140	1	per 1/4 cup
Angel Food Cake	45	190	0	5	42	0	0	0	0	0	120	0	based on 10 slices
Basic Orecchiette Pasta	48	330	10	10	67	1	0	0	0.5	0	0	3	
Orecchiette, Tomatoes & Ricotta Salata	48	440	90	13	73	10	2	6	1	10	420	5	
Orecchiette, Broccoli Raab & Anchovies	49	470	140	12	69	16	2	11	2	5	630	4	
Orecchiette, Mussels & Mint	49	480	120	17	71	13	7	4	1	55	670	4	
Kettle-Grill Clambake	52	1030	400	96	60	45	11	23	6	260	1410	6	w/o butter for dipping
Thai Hot & Sour Shrimp Soup	57	150	50	15	12	5	1	3	1	85	860	1	per 2-cup serving
Lemongrass Roast Chicken	58	460	230	46	10	26	6	11	6	145	1650	1	using 3 lb. chicken
Ginger-Lime Dipping Sauce	58	30	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	5	520	0	per tablespoon
Seared Sea Bass with Lemongrass Crust	59	390	190	35	16	21	11	5	3	70	1290	3	w/ 1/4 cup sauce
Thai Green Curry Sauce	59	35	25	1	2	2.5	2.5	0	0	0	90	0	per tablespoon
Lemongrass Lemonade	59	230	0	1	62	0	0	0	0	0	750	1	per cup
Ice Cream Sandwich S'mores	65	620	330	10	65	37	21	11	2	280	250	2	per sandwich

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

Southern Biscuits for Body and Soul

As a child of the Ozarks, and of the 1950s, I grew up on the southern side of a major boundary of American regional cooking.

In those days, a fault line ran through the Midwest, north of which butter and wheat ruled, south of which lard and corn reigned. Another mark of the boundary line was the leavening used to make bread rise. To the North, yeast was the power source for breakfast breads, but to the South, the fuel of choice was baking powder. It still is across much of the rural South.

You know you've crossed the Leavening Line when biscuits routinely come with your breakfast at small town cafés. You'll find toast, bagels, and English muffins (all yeast-risen) in these places, but ordering them will reveal your Yankee origins as surely as will your accent.

When I was growing up, my family, like the families of everyone else I knew, ate biscuits for breakfast almost every day of the week—biscuits with ham and eggs, biscuits and gravy, biscuits with honey. If we didn't have biscuits, we had another baking-powder-leavened bread: hot cakes, which I've learned to call pancakes after years of living out West.

I still don't know whether we were too poor to buy "store-boughten" bread, as we called it, or whether my parents secretly felt that it was still the extravagance it had been in their Depression-era childhoods. I suspect that they

simply liked biscuits better than toast.

Whatever the case, I was in high school before we acquired our first toaster of any kind, a shiny new toaster oven. But even then we used the toaster oven mostly just to broil the cut, buttered sides of leftover biscuits to a crunchy light brown, to be served with soup or as a bed on which to ladle creamed ham for lunch—which we called dinner.

Leftover biscuits also made a fine after-school



**My mother found my
four-year-old sister carefully covering
small pieces of biscuit with dirt,
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planting "biscuit trees."**

snack, capable of keeping a kid's body and soul glued together for those couple of hungry hours before the supper we were not to ruin our appetites for. They were wonderfully portable. Wrapped in waxed paper, they fit neatly in a jacket pocket, to be munched on after vandalizing the neighbor kids' fort or excavating yet another room in our own.

Biscuits became a part of our family folklore—the stories retold of my chubby, two-year-old brother bursting into tears at the Sunday dinner table when the visiting preacher reached over to take

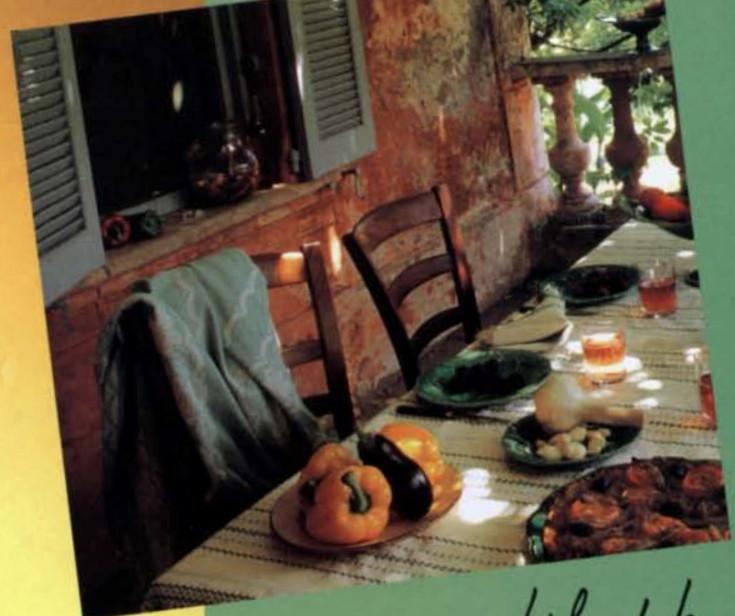
the last biscuit on the platter; of my mother's discovery of my four-year-old sister digging little holes in the flower bed, carefully covering small pieces of biscuit with dirt, solemnly explaining that she was planting "biscuit trees." Or of Maynard, whose ability to catch a cold biscuit on the fly would shame any modern-day Frisbee-catching dog.

I used to think that it was too much trouble to make biscuits for only myself. But one Sunday morning a while back, finding neither bread nor anything else I fancied in the cupboard, I knew that getting dressed and going to

the store was too much trouble. So I set to and whipped up a batch of biscuits that even my mother, a master biscuit-maker, would have been proud of.

Although I hadn't done it in years, I was surprised at how soon I sat down to what in Arkansas is called "a mess of cat heads" (one of those southern metaphors the origins of which I hesitate to speculate on). Now, whenever I wake up with biscuits on my mind, I heed the message that maybe my adult body and soul need some regluing. The restorative powers of biscuits, I'm happy to report, operate across regional boundaries and are even magnified by the addition of jam made from Pacific Northwest blackberries.

Sara Eilene Boyett now bakes her biscuits in Ketchikan, Alaska, where she lives aboard a 30-foot sailboat. ♦



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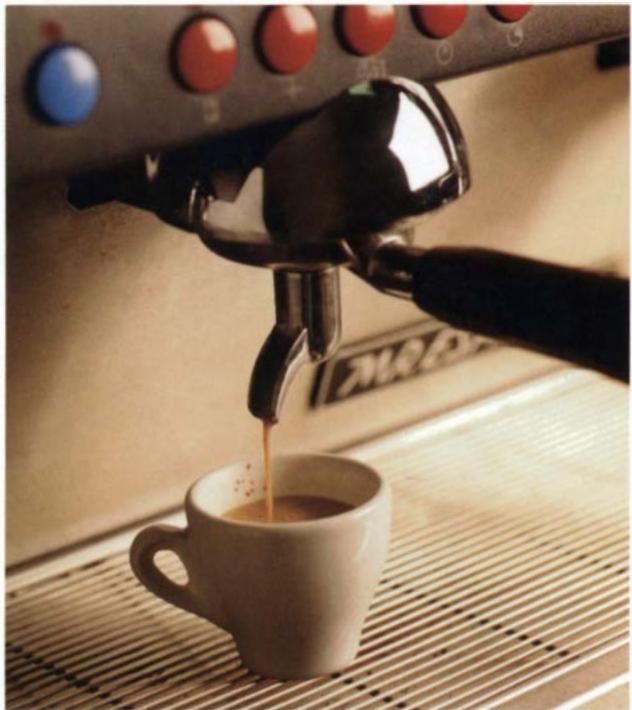
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Oak-Roasting Coffee in the Italian Tradition



The proof is in the cup. The hallmark of DiRuocco's coffee is deep, smooth flavor with none of the bitterness or harsh taste often associated with espresso.

"Oak enhances the flavor of coffee beans in a way that no other fuel can," says Carlo DiRuocco of Mr. Espresso in Oakland, California. DiRuocco first learned the craft of roasting coffee and the importance of oak fuel when he was a young apprentice to a master roaster in Salerno, Italy.

Today, DiRuocco's devotion to oak-roasted beans means a labor-intensive roasting process, but the result is coffee that's rich and smooth without a trace of harsh acidity.

At Mr. Espresso, beans are roasted slowly, for as long as 24 minutes over a low oak fire. (Roasters typically heat their beans for a much shorter time—as little as eight minutes—at a much higher temperature.) The result is a medium-roast bean with more complexity and aroma and none of the harsh bitterness or burnt flavor of the fashionable dark roasts.



Carlo DiRuocco learned his trade as an apprentice to a master roaster in Salerno, Italy. Today, his oak-roasted coffee is some of the most sought-after in America.



"When you drink coffee, you should be able to hear all the beans talking to you," says DiRuocco. He uses mostly low-acid Arabica beans from Central America and Africa. Each variety of the raw green beans is roasted separately to bring out its best characteristics.



Coffee's flavor is born in fire. Before roasting, the raw beans have no identifiable coffee taste. Oak's moist heat penetrates the beans slowly and evenly, enhancing their flavor in a way that heat from no other fuel can.



Hot beans fresh from the roaster whirl in the cooling tray and fill the room with an irresistible aroma. Many roasters use water to quicken the cooling process, but DiRuocco insists on air-cooling his beans. Although it takes more time, air-cooling allows the beans to develop their peak flavor.